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CAPRICE

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY
SIL-VARA

Adapted by Philip Moeller



GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.
1929

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FIRST EDITION

CHARACTERS

ALBERT

ROBERT

THE DOCTOR


A CLERK

ILSA VON ILSSEN

AMALIA

A DELICATE LADY

MINNA



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THE CAST OF THE THEATRE GUILD PRODUCTION
As presented at the Guild Theatre, New York, December 31, 1928

CAPRICE

A play in three acts

BY SIL-VARA

Adapted by PHILIP MOELLER

Production directed by PHILIP MOELLER

Setting designed by ALINE BERNSTEIN

THE CAST

<i>Counselor Albert Von Echardt</i>	Alfred Lunt
<i>A Delicate Lady</i>	Geneva Harrison
<i>Minna</i>	Caroline Newcomb
<i>The Doctor</i>	Ernest Cossart
<i>Clerk</i>	Leonard Loan
<i>Amalia</i>	Lily Cahill
<i>Ilsa Von Ilsen</i>	Lynn Fontanne
<i>Robert</i>	Douglass Montgomery

The Scene is Counselor Von Echardt's Study in Vienna

ACT I—Afternoon

ACT II—A week later

ACT III—Ten days later

Stage Manager—Leonard Loan

Assistant Stage Manager—Geneva Harrison

The THEATRE GUILD, Inc.

Board of Managers

Theresa Helburn
Lawrence Langner

Philip Moeller
Lee Simonson

Maurice Wertheim
Helen Westley

Executive Director: Theresa Helburn

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Charles A. Riegelman

Traveling Subscription Secretary
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ACT ONE

CAPRICE

ACT ONE

Albert's study. Furnished in good taste. A very big desk with a telephone. Bookshelves along the walls. A couch. This man's room is thought of as opening into Albert's office. The DELICATE LADY and ALBERT alone. She is just giving him her hand to say good-bye.

DELICATE LADY

[*Out of a sob*] You are so encouraging, you give me new hope.

ALBERT

Rely upon me, madam, I will manage your divorce for you, and I can assure you, you will never have to return to your brute of a husband.

DELICATE LADY

How can I ever thank you?

[*Big sob. She takes hand away and wipes her eyes.*]

ALBERT

By leaving your little hand in mine a moment longer.

CAPRICE

DELICATE LADY

You are so kind to me, so understanding. [*He kisses hand.*] I am so grateful.

ALBERT

I am grateful too.

DELICATE LADY

You?

ALBERT

What would our appalling profession be if it weren't for such charming clients as you?

DELICATE LADY

[*Switches her entire mood.*] You mustn't speak like that.

You should be as proud of your profession as it is of you.

ALBERT

Why? It's a ruinous profession. The world becomes nothing but a courtroom—people, clients—and life, a trial. [*Taking her hand again.*]

DELICATE LADY

And when the trial is over [*Bows her head*] the clients disappear?

ALBERT

As clients [*She lifts her head*], dear lady. [*Taking both hands*] I haven't disappointed you, I hope?

ACT ONE

5

DELICATE LADY

No. You are an excellent lawyer.

ALBERT

[*Face to face*] Sometimes I think I am, but my opponents always know I'm not.

DELICATE LADY

You do yourself an injustice.

ALBERT

How kind of you. Perhaps you'll sometime give me more reason [*Kisses hand.*] to have faith in myself. [*Kisses her hand again.*]

DELICATE LADY

Faith in your profession?

ALBERT

I said faith in myself.

[*At this moment a CLERK knocks on door left.*]

DELICATE LADY

Oh, dear. That means I must go! [*Rises and exits C.*]
Shall I call you later?

ALBERT

By all means.

DELICATE LADY

Thanks, I will.

CAPRICE

ALBERT

[*Holding door for her.*] Don't forget.

DELICATE LADY

Forget! How could I?

[*She exists. CLERK knocks again.*]

ALBERT

Come in.

CLERK

[*Entering from the office left*] For you to sign, sir.
[*MINNA enters from rear door.*]

MINNA

The doctor's waiting outside.

ALBERT

[*Busy signing his letters, turns*] Tell him to come right in.

[*DOCTOR enters, comes down centre. MINNA exits.*]

[*ALBERT writes*] I'll be free in a moment. . . .

[*Speaks to CLERK*] Please telephone Mr. Menzel and ask him to be here to-morrow at half-past nine.

[*CLERK off with letters.*]

How are you?

DOCTOR

And how are you?

ACT ONE

7

ALBERT

Splendid, splendid. I've just had a charming client. I always feel splendid when a woman's flirting with me.

DOCTOR

Perhaps that's the only medicine you need.

ALBERT

It's my favourite medicine. *Blonde* medicine. I'm feeling simply magnificent.

DOCTOR

Then why did you send for me? I've told you over and over again there's nothing organically wrong with you.

ALBERT

[*He and DOCTOR cross down to front of sofa D. R.*]

Just the same there are many times when I'm not so well.

DOCTOR

You're a hypochondriac.

ALBERT

[*Offers the DOCTOR a cigarette*] Well isn't that a disease?

DOCTOR

[*Sitting L. end of sofa*] Oh, I remember you at high school. You were just the same then as you are now. You

never stick to anything. With all your brains and your charm you never satisfied anybody, neither your teachers nor yourself. [*Lights cigarette.*] Twenty-five years of that and what can you expect but hypochondria?

ALBERT

Hypochondria starts in the stomach, not in high school.

DOCTOR

No, no. In both places. Your appetite's all right, isn't it?

ALBERT

[*Sitting R. end of sofa*] There's hardly anything I like as well as a good dinner—hardly anything—but just when it's time for the liqueurs, and the guests are beginning to enjoy that delicious, comfortable, satisfied feeling—then my martyrdom begins. Do you know what heartburn is, Doctor?—It's killing me, it's killing me.

DOCTOR

No, I don't think so. What you need is just a pinch of bicarbonate of soda.

ALBERT

Pinch! I eat the stuff by the pound.

DOCTOR

Well?

ACT ONE

9

ALBERT

Bicarbonate of soda gives me heartburn.

DOCTOR

Really. Bicarbonate of soda gives you heartburn? I wonder what I could do for you if you were really ill. You know you're beginning to be an interesting case—psychologically. You'd better see Freud.

ALBERT

No, it's nothing like that.

DOCTOR

Very well, I'll give you an examination since you've sent for me again.

ALBERT

I suppose you think there's nothing the matter with me?

DOCTOR

Lie down.

ALBERT

Shall I take off my coat?

[The DOCTOR has crossed around R. end of sofa and is now at its back. He indicates yes to the above question and opens Albert's vest. ALBERT is lying prone on sofa.]

It's not going to hurt?

DOCTOR

[*Examining him*] Does that hurt?

ALBERT

No.

DOCTOR

That?

ALBERT

No.

DOCTOR

Here?

[*He tickles him. ALBERT laughs and sits up.*]

Oh! There's nothing the matter with you.

ALBERT

There's an enormous lump under my heart.

DOCTOR

All right. I'll listen to your heart.

[*He goes to the table in alcove for his stethoscope.*]

ALBERT

I suppose my symptoms are too complicated for you. You know when this burning becomes unbearable—and sometimes it's brought on by the slightest emotion—I try to bear it by lying on my left side, but if I lie on my right side. . . .

ACT ONE

11

DOCTOR

[As he listens to his heart] Very well.

[There is a pause.]

ALBERT

You know, Doctor, I heard the funniest story at the Club——

DOCTOR

Never mind the story.

ALBERT

But it was very good——

DOCTOR

Never mind. I'm listening to your heart.

[There is a pause as he finishes the examination.]

I'm sorry, but there's absolutely nothing the matter with you.

ALBERT

[Sitting up on sofa] I suppose my symptoms are too complicated for you. Why can't I lie on my right side? Oh, don't strain yourself. I've asked every specialist in Europe, and not one could give me an answer.

[ALBERT has risen and the DOCTOR is now helping him with his coat. He crosses to mirror D. L.]

I'd like to see us lawyers getting away with that. A lawyer must have an answer to anything. We don't admit

either the unexpected or the unanswerable. Yes. No matter how complicated, how tricky, how deep-seated the trouble, the legal logician must be capable of diagnosing the case. Doctor, why can't I lie on my right side?

DOCTOR

Good God! What difference does it make. Lie on your left.

ALBERT

It's not as simple as all that. I'm just as ashamed of it as if I were bow-legged.

DOCTOR

But you needn't be ashamed of it. It isn't something that anyone can see. Oh, the whole thing's ridiculous.

ALBERT

Ridiculous? Well, it's a tragedy to me. It wouldn't be so bad if I were bow-legged. People would know how to take that. It would be so obvious, so final. There would be nothing to do about it—but what am I to do? Suppose—well—suppose . . .

DOCTOR

Oh!

ALBERT

[*Crosses, sits L. end of sofa*] Suppose . . .

DOCTOR

[*Laughing*] Yes, I understand.

ALBERT

Suppose I'm with a lady—and the mood brings on an attack of heartburn? Am I to say, "Madam—you think me odd, but I beg you not to judge too rashly. Don't blame me."—And I suppose I'm to add, "The fact is I cannot lie on my right side."

DOCTOR

[*Laughing and turning to him*] Now I am interested [*still laughing*].

ALBERT

You know it's a little difficult to enjoy the rapture of a kiss in the midst of a clinical explanation.

DOCTOR

Ah! So that's it. That's really what's the matter with you. [*Imitating ALBERT*] "Dearest lady, I cannot lie on my right side."

My dear Albert, love affairs aren't the whole of life.

ALBERT

No, but they are the most of it. There's no escaping that.

DOCTOR

Oh, come now.

ALBERT

I see you don't agree. That's why you don't realize the importance of an illness like this.

DOCTOR

It's all nerves. Try to relax. Don't smoke so much. Don't take these clients of yours so seriously that you have to worry about them after office hours. Oh! by the way, how is Mrs. Von Ilsen? Why isn't she here?

ALBERT

We're together all week. We have decided that each of us must have a day off—that is, she has decided.

DOCTOR

Nonsense—why don't you marry? She has been a widow for eight years. You are entirely free. I can't make you out. One question—does Mrs. Von Ilsen know about this—bow-leggedness of yours? [*Jokingly.*]

ALBERT

You are not trying to be funny, are you?

DOCTOR

But why should a doctor try to be funny? [*Seriously.*]

ACT ONE

15

ALBERT

No, Mrs. Von Ilsen does not know. I have had sufficient finesse to keep it from her for two years. She does think me moody, though—as I do her.

DOCTOR

Perhaps she is secretly a victim of heartburn, too.

ALBERT

You are trying to be funny.

DOCTOR

And perhaps she can lie only on her right side. No, no, since you can only lie on your left and she on her right—well, obviously, you compliment each other. There's your ideal marriage. I'll suggest this to Mrs. Von Ilsen.

ALBERT

You will do nothing of the kind.

DOCTOR

No medicine can cure your disease—it's nothing but egotism.

ALBERT

Egotism!—me—I'm the kindest of men. [*Crosses to desk.*]

DOCTOR

Yes, when it comes to yourself. But, seriously, there's nothing that shrivels a man up as quickly as the acid of this sort of introspection. All the bicarbonate in the world can't cure that. You must relax. Let me speak to Mrs. Von Ilsen.

[MINNA *knocks and enters.*]

MINNA

Please, Counselor, there's a lady downstairs.
[ALBERT *jumps up.*]

DOCTOR

[*Under his breath to ALBERT*] Are your symptoms beginning again?

ALBERT

My office hours are over. [*Crossing to piano U. L. and putting flower in buttonhole.*]

MINNA

She says it's about something personal, sir.

ALBERT

Young?

MINNA

Between thirty-five and forty.
[ALBERT *takes flower out of buttonhole.*]

ACT ONE

17

ALBERT

Has she been here before?

MINNA

No, sir.

ALBERT

Show the lady up. [MINNA *exits.*] Good-bye. Perhaps •
there's nothing the matter with me after all.

DOCTOR

We'll go on with your symptoms another time.

ALBERT

Well, good-bye—I do think I begin to feel it coming
on again.

DOCTOR

What you need is more men clients.

[*He exits. ALBERT X's up to piano and plays. MINNA enters and bows AMALIA in and goes off. AMALIA crosses to U. C.*]

AMALIA

Good-afternoon, Albert.

[ALBERT *stops playing.*]

ALBERT

[*At piano, turns quickly, taken aback*] Amalia!

AMALIA

Yes.

ALBERT

[*Rises and crosses to her, kissing hand*] This is a surprise.

AMALIA

[*Speaks quietly, sure and gay*] After twelve years. Yes, counselor. I have left you in peace for twelve years.

ALBERT

Left me in peace? Why, what do you mean? Why are you so formal with me? Sit down. [*She sits.*] May I give you some coffee? [ALBERT goes to bell-pull U. R.]

AMALIA

Thank you, but I didn't come to pay a call. I have—I have things to discuss with you.

ALBERT

After all these years?

AMALIA

I've often wanted to talk with you, but I was always afraid I'd come at the wrong moment.

[MINNA enters.]

ALBERT

Coffee, please.

MINNA

Yes, Counselor.

[MINNA *off*.]

ALBERT

Do you need—are you in financial difficulties?

AMALIA

No, that is not the reason I came. I have work, and the allowance you make your child is ample.

ALBERT

Well, then, I really can't see why——

AMALIA

Really not?

ALBERT

[*Shakes his head*] I hope that I have made your life easier. You see, Amalia, I am not terribly rich—you know that—otherwise I would have——

AMALIA

I've just told you that I didn't come here to talk about money. I come to you to-day after twelve years and after much thought. I wanted to spare you, but it won't do. The time has come when I must talk to you about your son.

ALBERT

[*Taken aback*] My son? Well?

CAPRICE

AMALIA

I have done my duty. Now, won't you do yours?

ALBERT

[*Frightened*] My duty? Why I hardly know the boy. I only just saw him once—years ago. How old is he now?

AMALIA

Sixteen.

ALBERT

Sixteen! For God's sake, am I as old as that!

AMALIA

[*Laughs*] He goes to the university in the fall.

ALBERT

Oh! No, no, no!

AMALIA

I've done all I can for him, but now he's arrived at the age when he needs a father.

[*MINNA enters with a coffee tray which she places on table in alcove, then goes.*]

ALBERT

Amalia, I hope you don't want me to decide this minute. I—I—this is all so sudden. I don't know what to

say. I—do you think it wise to create any fresh bond between us? Wouldn't it be better to leave things as they were—as they are now?

AMALIA

Let me tell you how things are.

ALBERT

[*Unpleasantly moved, protesting*] I know all that, Amalia. We went over that—God knows how many times we went over that those first years. . . .

AMALIA

That isn't what I want to speak of now. Things were entirely different then. I was still struggling. I was fighting my fate. In those days I wanted to cry out—to accuse you. To-day you can see I speak calmly as if I were talking of things that did not touch my life at all. I have come to terms with my fate. Completely. After our separation I became a different and a happier person.

ALBERT

Happier?

AMALIA

Yes, happier. When you saw me just now you were frightened. You thought, "Here comes one of those scenes with an injured woman." Well, there's not going to be any scene. Sixteen long years have finished that

for myself and for you. You have nothing more to fear from me.

ALBERT

Shall we have some coffee?

[*He goes up to coffee tray U. C. In alcove. She follows him, taking off her gloves, which she leaves on table.*]

AMALIA

Oh, what a charming place you have—and how delightful to have coffee right here in the window.

ALBERT

Will you pour?

AMALIA

Certainly. How many lumps do you take? I'm sorry, I've forgotten.

ALBERT

Oh, it doesn't matter. Two. So you thought I was afraid of a scene.—Not at all. Intimate scenes and broken lives are so much part of my profession that I've cut them out of my personal existence entirely. You may think that cynical—not at all—it is merely self-preservation. I simply can't absorb any more emotion. I run my personal affairs with businesslike routine.

AMALIA

Including this one?

ALBERT

Yes, it's just a question of completing each case and letting life go on.

AMALIA

And I suppose how it goes on after the judge's decision is each one's own business?

ALBERT

Who knows! I am not really hard-hearted. In fact, I have to harden myself. Years ago, of course, it was different. When I think of those scenes . . .

AMALIA

I was young then. You had torn me out of my well-ordered life and then flung me away.

ALBERT

Amalia! Flung you away?

AMALIA

Yes! yes! I was very religious—like my father.

ALBERT

Yes, a minister, wasn't he?

AMALIA

Yes. I remember the first time I saw you. You were at the piano playing. You still play don't you?

CAPRICE

ALBERT

Yes, now and then.

AMALIA

But because I came to your house as a trained nurse you thought——

ALBERT

I thought nothing at all. I simply saw a lovely girl who was taking care of my sister.

[*Pause.*]

I remember your beautiful hair.

AMALIA

[*Smiles in happy reminiscence*] Yes, that is the way you always used to talk—and that night when you came into my room—well—I couldn't struggle against you. I loved you. You know how much. Duty—conventions—nothing mattered. I was swept away.

ALBERT

Amalia, I know, I know. I felt it as much as you. You didn't defend yourself against me but against yourself. It was as if your whole nature were driving you to surrender.

AMALIA

The whole meaning of my life, my principles, my education, home—all gave way at once. You know. My parents never forgave me.

ALBERT

Amalia, why stir up all these memories?

AMALIA

You're right.

[*Pause.*]

I've developed my son's character as far as I can, but now he is on the verge of manhood and he needs more than I can give him. That is why I have come to you.

ALBERT

Oh! I see.

AMALIA

Take your son.

ALBERT

And if I do—what will happen to you?

AMALIA

Leave me out of it. I just want to see my son as often as he wants to see me.

ALBERT

I thought life had no more surprises.

[*AMALIA takes her first swallow of coffee.*]

AMALIA

You aren't drinking your coffee.

ALBERT

I can't stand coffee in the afternoon.

[*The telephone rings.*]

Excuse me.

[*Speaks into the 'phone*] Hello—yes—oh, Ilsa? I didn't recognize your voice at first. [*Hesitating*] No one—the doctor was here—he finds nothing the matter. . . . What's funny about that?

[*Speaks to AMALIA*] Pardon me, one moment.

Yes, there is someone here. . . . Yes, later—later—do come. I want you to see. . . . No—no—it's no one. No one at all. . . . All right. See you later.

[*Hangs up. To AMALIA*] A lady.

AMALIA

Yes, I know, that was Mrs. Von Ilsen, whom you have loved for two years and whom you are going to marry.

ALBERT

Extraordinary! How did you know?

AMALIA

[*Very calm*] Yes, it is extraordinary. You won't believe it, Albert, but there are people who still, after sixteen years, have the desire, the time, and the malice to keep me informed—-anonymously of course—of how you live and of your adventures.

ALBERT

Really, is that possible?

AMALIA

I often wonder who has the cruelty to send me such letters—what sort of monstrous person he can be.

ALBERT

No monster—just one of our kind friends. So even that wasn't spared you?

AMALIA

[*Protesting, in a matter-of-fact voice*] Oh, it doesn't matter. If you can fight through, stay clean in spite of all the dirt through which they try to drag you . . . [*In accents of joy*] you are so strong and sure, so calm and so full of faith that all the evil in the world can't touch you.

ALBERT

My dear Amalia, I marvel at you.

[*She bows her head timidly.*]

Don't bow your head—you may well carry it high—higher than mine. I didn't mean any harm. You know we were dreadfully young, Amalia.

AMALIA

[*Breaking in*] Don't accuse yourself. You showed me a bit of Paradise and then snatched it away from me.

Now you are just any man to me. No, not just any man. Hand me my bag. You made a wonderful speech in court the other day defending a poor unmarried mother. When I read that, when I saw with what sincerity and sympathy you spoke of her, I couldn't help it, I had to come to you. I knew you would understand me.

ALBERT

[*Somewhat taken aback*] It was my speech, then. . . . I myself gave you the impetus to come here. [*Lightly, self-mocking*] Well, that was pleading with a vengeance.

[*Thinks.*]

What is the boy's name?

AMALIA

[*Taking out photograph*] Robert.

ALBERT

Not Albert?

AMALIA

No.

ALBERT

Good-looking, isn't he? [*About to hand picture back but takes another look.*] How does he stand in his studies?

AMALIA

Very well. His teachers are enthusiastic.

ALBERT

Really? That never happened to me. What does he want to be?

AMALIA

That's just it—he is, how shall I put it?—spirituelle—he wants to be a poet—could he? I don't want to thwart him, for something sure inside him seems to guide his thoughts; but—if you will just get him over the worst years, his transition.

ALBERT

Poetry! It's a children's disease, nothing more. Let him study law first, like me. If he survives that, then he can be a poet.

AMALIA

Thanks, Albert, I always knew that you are really a kind person at heart. I intrust him to you.

ALBERT

You say that to me? . . .

AMALIA

Yes, I know there's no malice or cruelty in you. What people have to be they must be.

ALBERT

True. Well, Amalia?

AMALIA

What I want is to give my son the right environment—a home among distinguished and sympathetic people who will further his best interests.

ALBERT

[*Interrupting her to offer her a cigarette. She nods "No."*] Do you mind? [*As he takes one.*]

AMALIA

Let me tell you something. Once, when Robert was six years old, the craving to get out of all the misery was more than I could stand. The desire to see something different, to experience something that would help me to forget. I decided to take a trip to Leipzig.

ALBERT

In God's name! Why Leipzig?

AMALIA

I don't know. I suppose it was childish of me. I can't understand it to-day—but I left Robert with a neighbor who was very fond of him. I took a train to Leipzig. I will never forget it. Coming into the station early in the morning—sleepy and crumpled. There I stood on the platform with my handbag and my umbrella. Suddenly it occurred to me that I did not know where to turn. No one knew I was coming, so no one expected me. Have

you ever been to a place where no one expected you? I stepped out into the street—everything was hostile and strange. I went into a café, sat down in a corner—alone—and took the next train home. And there too no one was waiting for me at the station. I want to spare my son that; there must be someone waiting for him. [*Turns away sobbing.*]

ALBERT

Don't cry, Amalia. I'm very sorry—the harm one person can do another. Amalia, I would like to make amends for all the pain I've given you, but how?

AMALIA

Let Robert come to you. If it does not work out, then at any rate your conscience is clear. But it will work—once you see Robert—he is so handsome—just like you—when I first knew you—only handsomer, really. And sometimes when he talks he seems so intelligent—so wise.

ALBERT

Well, if only a part of what you say is so . . . The question is, how can I arrange to have him here? [*Thinking and crossing D. C.*] No, no, it's impossible. I can't take him in.

AMALIA

Why not?

ALBERT

Ilsa.

AMALIA

I've thought of that too, but——

ALBERT

Ilsa and I—are not married yet—and how can I—Robert is no child—it wouldn't be right. And what is to become of you? This problem isn't so easily solved.

AMALIA

[*Breaking in*] It's proof enough I want nothing for myself when I say, Marry Mrs. Von Ilsen—don't worry about me. I don't know her, but I hope she will make my son a good stepmother.

ALBERT

Have you spoken about all of this to Robert?

AMALIA

Not a word. He has only known for a few days that his father is living and in Vienna, nothing more.

ALBERT

Do you mean he's never heard of me?

AMALIA

Of course he's heard of you. He's often read your name in the papers in connection with big trials, without knowing who you were.

ALBERT

You know, Amalia, perhaps it is the desire for a new experience—caprice—you see I'm honest. Perhaps you'll think me eccentric—but I must say that a meeting with my son would interest me.

AMALIA

Then you will talk with him?

ALBERT

Don't let's rush matters. All this has taken me by surprise. I must talk to Ilsa too. She's part of the family, so to speak. I must know how she takes it.

AMALIA

[*Breaking in*] I'm not asking you for a promise—just to see and talk with Robert before you decide anything.

ALBERT

Very well. I will talk to him. [*Crossing to desk L. for his date book.*] I would like to offer my son something in the nature of an atonement. Maybe, if he came here—let me see—next Sunday afternoon, alone. You will tell him, of course, that he is going to see his father. You can come an hour or so later. And if we find we can understand each other, then you and I can talk more definitely about it. [*She rises. Gives her his hand.*] That much I

promise. You're happy? You haven't lost him. I shouldn't have taken that coffee. This is a delicate situation that can't be handled too abruptly.

AMALIA

You're right—that's so.

ALBERT

Is he anything like me? Has he anything of my manner?

AMALIA

Naturally, he knows nothing—of society and smart life. But he has an instinctive sense of what life really is. He astonishes me sometimes when he suddenly——



ILSA

[*Enters rather violently*] May I? I'm sorry, I didn't know you have a client.

ALBERT

Ilsa, this is no client—but the mother of my child.

ILSA

Oh!

[*Pause.*]

AMALIA

Well, Albert? Does our arrangement hold?

ALBERT

Of course.

ILSA

Oh, don't let me drive you away.

AMALIA

I must go home.

ILSA

[*After AMALIA is at coffee table*] Well, at least he offered you a cup of coffee.

AMALIA

Next Sunday afternoon, then. Good-bye, Albert, I thank you with all my heart.

[ALBERT bows and kisses her hand. She bows to ILSA, says, "Good-bye," and goes.]

ILSA

ILSA, the mother of my child. [*Imitating AMALIA*] Next Sunday afternoon, then—I thank you with all my heart. So that's the way you break the news to me.

ALBERT

There are certain moments when a direct brusqueness is the only way.

ILSA

Quite. Then you deceived me, Albert?

ALBERT

[*Standing R. of coffee table*] Yes. Seventeen years ago.

ILSA

What?

ALBERT

My son is ready for college.

ILSA

Albert. How enchanting!

ALBERT

[*Sitting in chair R. of coffee table*] I think it's tragic.

ILSA

But it isn't true—you're making all this up.

ALBERT

You can't make up a sixteen-year-old son.

ILSA

I didn't know anything about it.

ALBERT

I hardly knew anything about it myself.

ILSA

But, Albert, you must have known at the time.

ALBERT

No.

ILSA

Don't you remember?

ALBERT

But you know me, I . . .

ILSA

Yes, but still. What does she want? Money?

ALBERT

No.

ILSA

To make a scene? Ha! You have seduced me, you scoundrel!

ALBERT

No.

ILSA

You must marry me.

ALBERT

No, no.

ILSA

No? Well, what does she want?

CAPRICE

ALBERT

She wants me to let my son come and live with me.

ILSA

Aha!

ALBERT

Aha! And what does "Aha" mean?

ILSA

Um-humph!

ALBERT

"Um-humph!" And what does "um-humph" mean?

ILSA

She doesn't look as clever as all that.

ALBERT

Clever?

ILSA

Well, my dear, first your son comes here, and in three months you're married to his mother. Did she know about me?

ALBERT

Yes, she knew.

ILSA

How did she? Did she have you watched? She seems a thorough little person.

ALBERT

Not in the way you mean. Ilsa, why do women always think the worst of each other?

ILSA

Because they're women—because they have a real sense of values.

ALBERT

[*Grave*] Amalia touched me deeply.

ILSA

Um-humph!

ALBERT

You'd better enlarge your vocabulary.

ILSA

What did she say? Did she tell you how unhappy she was? Ah! Albert, you're so susceptible, dear. You're a match for any jury, but when it comes to women, you're a child. You always have been—any woman, if she's just a little clever, can do what she wants with you.

ALBERT

She doesn't want to do anything with me.

ILSA

No? Only to have her son come and live here.

ALBERT

She says it's inhuman for me not to care about my child.

ILSA

Inhuman! Aha! And in two months she'll be saying it's inhuman to separate a mother from her son—which is equally true. What else should she say? Your baby, Albert. Your dear little baby—dear little Albert.

ALBERT

[*Correcting her*] Robert.

ILSA

Little Robert.

ALBERT

There can be no question of taking Amalia into my house. That has nothing to do with it. You and I must get married.

ILSA

We are married.

ALBERT

No, I mean married.

ILSA

Are you proposing to me? This is so sudden.

ALBERT

If my son is to live here everything must be absolutely *comme il faut*.

ILSA

I have a feeling—you know how intuitive I am. I'm sure you'll never really want to have him here.

ALBERT

Well, I'm not so sure.

ILSA

You don't even know the child. You scarcely know the mother. In what sort of milieu has he been brought up? In poverty, in a shabby middle-class milieu?

ALBERT

Peut-être.

ILSA

And now you're bringing him here to live with you.

ALBERT

I'm having my son come here so that I can talk to him to see if . . . Part of the time I can't live with you, but most of the time I can't live without you. So you've got to make up your mind.

ILSA

Why can't you live with me part of the time? Tell me.

CAPRICE

ALBERT

Because you irritate me. Sometimes I think you love me, and most of the time I know you don't.

ILSA

Darling, isn't that just as it should be?

ALBERT

Well, as for me, I'd rather not have the slightest doubt.

ILSA

Yes, so that you can do just as you want to and with an easy mind, so long as you can see your darling little Ilsa patiently sitting at home, darning your damn socks.

ALBERT

I tell you I only have a little flirtation now and then just to be sure of myself. It's part of my profession. I need that sort of assurance.

ILSA

Well, you see, I need it too.

ALBERT

Ah! So you've been untrue to me?

ILSA

Just as much as you are to me.

ALBERT

Ah! That's a confession.

ILSA

Is it? So you are untrue to me?

ALBERT

Ugh! Quibbling.

ILSA

I just let men make love to me now and then just to make sure that I'm young and charming. I need that sort of assurance.

ALBERT

I think these ideas of yours are unbearable. I won't stand for them.

ILSA

They're your ideas—not mine. What's a little flirtation now and then?

ALBERT

I know what a man says to a woman under those circumstances, and it's perfectly outrageous that you should allow any man to talk to you like that.

ILSA

Ah! So that's the way you talk to women. Oh, Albert!

CAPRICE

ALBERT

[*Sitting beside her on sofa*] Ilsa, you don't know how often I've wondered whether or not the only sensible thing for us to do would be to separate.

ILSA

Of course, darling.

ALBERT

I need a woman who is absolutely devoted to me, and not one who continually irritates and upsets me. Well, if you want to know, that is the reason I haven't married you up to now. .

ILSA

I was under the impression that it took two to make a marriage.

ALBERT

I thought you loved me.

ILSA

I thought you loved me too.

ALBERT

But love alone isn't a sufficient basis for marriage.

ILSA

Quite right, teacher!

ALBERT

Wrong, utterly wrong. There's no other basis for marriage.

ILSA

All right, then—let's get married.

ALBERT

Will you let me finish talking? It is no basis for marriage unless both people . . .

ILSA

Of course, not at all, just the same, even though . . .

ALBERT

I suppose you think that's an answer to my question?

ILSA

Must I always answer your last question? It was the answer to another question.

ALBERT

Which one?

ILSA

I've forgotten.

[*Absolute stillness.*]

ALBERT

Ilsa, you torture me.

ILSA

[*Lying in his arms on sofa*] And you torture me.

ALBERT

[*After she is lying in his arms he takes a pillow and puts it under her head*] We might as well be comfortable.

ILSA

Do you know why we always quarrel?

ALBERT

God, no.

ILSA

Well, listen darling. This morning—I'd just finished my bath—when I was fastening my garters—and talking to the canary——

ALBERT

Why you call that bird Erminegarde is beyond me.

ILSA

—suddenly it occurred to me; we're too much alike. You are like me and I am like you, only you're a man. We don't complement each other.

ALBERT

You are right. You're absolutely right. We are too much alike. We're too sophisticated. When I think, you're just as vain—as selfish—as pig-headed as I am.

ILSA

Oh! Albert!

ALBERT

It was fate that brought this boy into our lives to-day. We have a mission.

ILSA

Oh! We have a mission.

ALBERT

We must make up our minds to it. We must give up everything and educate my son.

ILSA

All right. Well, then, that's settled. Let's hope that you make a better job of him than you have of yourself.

ALBERT

Oh, thank you. [*Crosses and sits on desk chair L.*] I suppose you think that's clever?

ILSA

Yes. Now, look here, Albert, next Sunday that boy comes here for the first and last time.

ALBERT

Ilsa.

ILSA

Think what you like. I know it's a trick on the mother's part to get into your home herself. Just wait a few weeks—you'll see. Amalia knows what sort of a man you are. We both know what sort of a man you are. The whole thing will all begin again. But I won't have it. We don't need any other woman's son here. I'm perfectly capable of . . . I have rights too. I won't talk about whose rights should come first. She has the child as a weapon—your baby—your dear little baby. I have nothing but——

ALBERT

My love?

ILSA

Let us say your devotion. I grant that I'm a flirt. That I give you cause for suspicion and jealousy. It's entirely innocent. Nevertheless, as soon as all this is over and we are married everything will be changed.

ALBERT

What do you mean—that you are going to stop flirting or that you are going to stop being innocent?

ILSA

Both. You don't even know this child.

ALBERT

[*Forgetting*] What child?

ACT ONE

49

ILSA

Little Albert—I mean Robert.

ALBERT

That's just it. I'm having my son—who is no child, mind you—come here to talk to me so that I can judge whether we'll get on together. Robert is growing—he's almost a man. Amalia knows that she is inexperienced, so she turns to me—it's perfectly natural. But she hasn't the slightest objection to my marrying you. All she wants me to do is to advise the boy, enlighten him, call certain dangers to his attention, and so on.

ILSA

You're certainly the one to do that.

ALBERT

I don't deny it. I don't deny it. I will let him profit by my experience—although, when I come to think of it, the things I knew when I was sixteen . . .

ILSA

Yes, when I was sixteen—or was it fifteen?

ALBERT

I wish you wouldn't joke about it. You know how it hurts me.

ILSA

And now I'm thirty-two.

ALBERT

No, you're wrong. You're sixteen—twice.

ILSA

How sweet of you, dear.

ALBERT

I didn't mean to be sweet. I want to have one person about me who will submit to my authority.

ILSA

Wouldn't you just love that?

ALBERT

A child is malleable stuff. I'd like to try my hand once at modelling.

ILSA

Model away, model away, dear ; but do something for me, will you? Of course, I know I'm nobody. Your poor little Ilsa has just become the second tail to the cow.

ALBERT

Don't be silly.

ILSA

But will you do something for me?

ALBERT

What?

ILSA

Don't finish the statue until you consult me.

ALBERT

Very well. What shall I call you when I introduce you to him?

ILSA

Better not call me what you called me the other night.

ALBERT

Oh! Ilsa, you're impossible. Shall I say the lady who has consented to be my bride?

ILSA

[*Horried*] For God's sake! Bride! Are there still such things? You won't have to say anything to him. You'll never get beyond the first conversation. To me he is a stranger, a complete stranger, I don't recognize his existence. Bride!

ALBERT

All right, all right. Will you promise me one thing?

ILSA

Yes, dear.

ALBERT

That you won't be rude or patronizing to Amalia.

ILSA

[*Jumping up*] My God! I have to go now.

ALBERT

Where to?

ILSA

[*Crossing U. C. toward coffee table*] I'm having dinner with Heidsick, the painter.

ALBERT

I suppose he's going to paint your portrait as Eve or Helen of Troy? Why do these fellows always have to paint what they're thinking of?

ILSA

We are dining at Sachers.

ALBERT

I won't have you dining with strange men.

ILSA

This is my day out.

ALBERT

I'll go with you.

ILSA

That would give me great pleasure.

ALBERT

But not me.

ILSA

Why not?

ALBERT

You'd like nothing better than to have me sitting opposite you while that brainless idiot made love to you.

ILSA

Doesn't it please you to see that other men find me attractive?

ALBERT

No.

ILSA

All right, then, let's stay home. Minna can cook us some nice soft-boiled eggs.

ALBERT

I hate soft-boiled eggs. You know what they do to me.

ILSA

What do they do to you?

ALBERT

Soft-boiled eggs!—so we can commit suicide? Each in his own corner?

ILSA

Well, what do you want?

ALBERT

Are you having an affair with him?

ILSA

Yes!

[*She turns and goes out U. R. ALBERT realizes he has let himself be carried away. Crosses D. R. toward bicarbonate of soda. ILSA reënters.*]

I'm spending the evening at my mother's—she isn't well.

ALBERT

Mumps, I suppose?

ILSA

Yes, mumps. [*She acts mumps.*]

ALBERT

Don't be silly.

ILSA

Well, don't you believe me? Call her house. Call me up there twice this evening so you can be quite sure that I'm nowhere else and so I can say good-night to you—and then you'll say good-night, Ilsa—and then I will have heard one gentle word from you to-day.

ALBERT

Yes! Oh, Ilsa! I can't live without you.

ILSA

I know, Albert. I too. Good-night.

ALBERT

Ilsa, you can be such an angel.

ILSA

I know—I know—good-night.

ALBERT

But why must you always lie?

ILSA

I don't lie. I just don't always tell the truth.

[*She Exits*]

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

A week after the first act. The same set. The stage is empty. Then MINNA enters, holds the door open, and ROBERT enters.

MINNA

This way, please. I'll tell Counselor von Eckhardt you're here.

ROBERT

[Smiles at her with childlike friendliness] One moment, please.

MINNA

Yes, sir.

[He takes out his handkerchief and dusts his shoes].

ROBERT

I've come a long way.

MINNA

Yes, I understand.

[MINNA smiles and nods in a friendly way and goes off L. ROBERT stands facing the door like a soldier. MINNA reënters, and ROBERT hears the door open and thinks at first that it is his father.]

MINNA

He'll be in in a minute.

ROBERT

Thank you.

[MINNA *exits R.*]

ALBERT

[*Entering from L.*] Robert.

ROBERT

Yes.

ALBERT

[*Crossing to his son and examining him. He is visibly pleased, but maintains a matter-of-factness.*] I'm very glad to see you. Sit down.

[*They cross down R. and sit on sofa, ROBERT at right end and ALBERT at left.*]

Curious. We must get used to each other first—quite objectively and critically.

ROBERT

Yes.

ALBERT

From what your mother has told me I know that you will realize why I don't greet you more warmly—why I don't kiss you and take you in my arms as you might expect a parent to do.

ROBERT

[*Like his mother for the most part, speaks in a calm, sure, gay tone*] Mother sends you her best regards and begs you to receive me like a friend.

ALBERT

Wouldn't you like to call me Father?

ROBERT

Gladly. But later a bit, perhaps.

ALBERT

[*Disappointed*] Oh! Very well. I couldn't do it either in your place. I mean we aren't father and son yet—we might get to know each other better. Let's have no pretence about it. We'll act like two men, won't we, Robert? [*A little rhetorical*] I am glad to see you, Robert, and make your acquaintance. I hope to be your friend. If we can find a basis on which to live together I shall endeavor to take your life into my hands and mold it. Up to now you have lived a rather cramped, necessitous life. Now it shall be my deepest desire to let you glimpse the heights and the depths. [*In a more natural tone*] This is the most remarkable encounter of my life—with myself, so to speak, in a younger, hitherto unknown edition. Perhaps we had better stand up. You're well built. [*He leads ROBERT across to mirror above desk L., surveys him—they stand back to back—ROBERT somewhat mystified.*]

ALBERT

[*At the mirror*] Yes, I am a little taller. You're well—I hope?

ROBERT

There's nothing the matter with me that I know of.

ALBERT

You're sure? Nothing the matter—heart—liver—nothing, my boy?

ROBERT

No, nothing.

ALBERT

No—stomach?

ROBERT

No, no stomach.

ALBERT

Good—good. You see, I suffer from all sorts of things.

ROBERT

You suffer?

ALBERT

Old age. Do you know, for instance, what heartburn is?

ROBERT

It has something to do with indigestion, hasn't it?

ALBERT

If you don't know, my boy, then there's nothing to worry about. I'll get you some new ties. You know life is much easier with a lot of ties to choose from. You have good taste. I suppose I'm partly responsible. Your mother's hair. Good-looking. It is interesting to see how many of the father's characteristics live on as a matter of course in the children. I'll buy you new shoes. . . .

ROBERT

They're dusty.

ALBERT

No, no. They're all right, but I'll get you new ones.

ROBERT

Thanks, Father.

ALBERT

What?

ROBERT

Father. . . .

[*Pause.*]

ALBERT

Go on.

ROBERT

When Mother told me I had a father I was amazed—a living father. She always said that he was dead. That

was the only untruth she ever told me—the only one in all her life. I couldn't believe it at all at first. But then I wanted to come right to you—and I had to wait a whole week.

ALBERT

[*Surprised*] You wanted to come to me?

ROBERT

[*In a timid but accusing voice*] Yes, of course, I wanted to see what he was like, my father who had not bothered with me for such a long time—who never bothered at all about my mother.

ALBERT

Why do you begin by reproaching me, my boy? This is the first time we've ever talked together.

ROBERT

No, no, I'm not reproaching you. I reproach myself for obeying Mother and keeping you waiting a whole week. I haven't been able to sleep a wink since I have known that my father—such a tremendous experience—what can I say?—How can I talk about my ties and shoes at a moment like this—when I know how much has to be done, and I want so much to help.

ALBERT

Help? Oh, you mean help your mother.

ROBERT

Mother too—of course—but I was ashamed. . . .

ALBERT

Yes?

ROBERT

I was ashamed because of you.

ALBERT

No, really? That is interesting.

ROBERT

Yes, I was ashamed of myself and dreadfully sorry that Mother and I were so happy and you were suffering and alone. I can't forgive myself that, Father. Have you been able to sleep——

ALBERT

[*Meaningfully, thinking of heartburn*] No.

ROBERT

[*Continuing*]—knowing you had a child—worrying about me?

ALBERT

I didn't worry, because I didn't want to worry. I just said there's nothing to worry about. You know, Robert, when you are a little older you'll understand how easy it is to forget things like that.

ROBERT

No.

ALBERT

No—what?

ROBERT

You can forget for a hundred years, then suddenly you remember! [*Pause.*] There are some things—some realities that can't be hidden forever.

ALBERT

What do you mean? Who put such ideas into your head? Your mother?

ROBERT

No. I thought it out that way myself. A child is something real. That's what I mean by reality, Father. It can never be lost. Some time it must find its way back where it belongs. Here I am.

ALBERT

But this is only an accident. In most cases like this the child and the parent never see each other again.

ROBERT

Father—aren't there certain mysterious bonds? I thought that the soul— —

ALBERT

No, no, now, none of that my dear boy. I'm sorry, but we can't start philosophizing about the soul. Let's stick to facts. You must give up all this transcendental metaphysics and come down to earth. Mysterious bonds! The soul! I can see fatherhood isn't going to be easy. [*Takes up the Civil Code*] Do you see this book? It's the Civil Code. Everything about everything is here. Birth—before birth—life—death and after death—but not a single word about the soul.

ROBERT

[*Simply*] Probably the soul has its own book of laws.

ALBERT

Now, look here, of one thing there must be no uncertainty from the very beginning. I have no intention of trying to exonerate myself in your eyes. That wouldn't be honest. [*Hesitates.*] No. Exonerate isn't exactly the word, either. I wonder will you be able to see it all in its true perspective—from my point of view.

ROBERT

I'll try, Father.

ALBERT

It's only in that way that you will be able to understand the misfortune that befell your mother—and I had

hoped that if you were a true son of mine you would realize that a man cannot be judged absolutely guilty just because he yields to an overwhelming—an inevitable law of nature. That's what happened to me, Robert, when I was a little older than you my boy—too young to foresee the consequences of my behavior.

ROBERT

But, Father, there are things concerning Mother and you and me that have nothing to do with any point of view.

ALBERT

I know, I know. I admit I did the most cowardly thing a man can do. There's no denying that. I ran away from my fate.

ROBERT

[*Sympathetically*] Father.

ALBERT

But I didn't think that you would be there sixteen years after to accuse me of it.

ROBERT

But, Father, I'm not accusing you of anything. I'm only sorry that we made you suffer all these years.

ALBERT

I don't know what you mean.

ROBERT

You said you suffered, before, from all sorts of things.
[*Points to his stomach.*]

ALBERT

Yes—yes—yes—but that has nothing to do with this.

ROBERT

Does it really hurt so badly?
[ALBERT looks at his son, curiously moved. ROBERT notices this.]

Father, you are suffering. I would like to help you.
[*Näve*] Don't despair. Mother will forgive you. Please don't worry any more.

ALBERT

Listen to me. Did you never steal pennies out of your mother's purse?

ROBERT

For heaven's sake, no.

ALBERT

Or lie to her?

ROBERT

No.

ALBERT

Or play hookey?

ROBERT

No.

ALBERT

[*Taking a deep breath in despair over his model boy*] God knows you're a model child. [*In a different tone*] Your mother's deepest wish is that I take you into this house, and I agreed I would if I felt that we could get on well together. Now, Robert, tell me about your life.

ROBERT

But I don't know where to begin.

ALBERT

Anywhere—anywhere. Just as long as I can find something.

ROBERT

Years ago my mother cried a lot. I thought it was because my father was dead.

ALBERT

And these last years?

ROBERT

She doesn't any more. We're happy now.

ALBERT

But you were living in such seclusion and poverty. Oh! I reproach myself.

ROBERT

No, Father, not at all. We didn't live in poverty. We had all we wanted. Mother showed me how to see things. Each day was more fun than the last. That was the way Mother taught me how to see life. And I've heard *Oberon* and read Schiller and all of Gril Prazer, and all of these belong to us. Music—and the distance—and flowers—and the sky—and everything.

ALBERT

Didn't your mother ever mention your father?

ROBERT

Oh, yes. I knew him so well that I could have drawn him.

ALBERT

Was it a good picture?

ROBERT

Oh, no, Father. I didn't do you justice at all. I imagined you'd be a much older man—if you were alive.

ALBERT

Well, I am—I am.

ROBERT

But, Father, for the last week it has been terrible. Mother is all changed.

ALBERT

How?

ROBERT

She's been all upset. Of course, now her whole life is going to be different, and I'm happy about that and grateful for Mother's sake.

ALBERT

I asked you to tell me about yourself and you do nothing but talk about your mother.

ROBERT

But that's the same thing, isn't it? I haven't been myself either this week, couldn't read or study. I've been all upset and excited and eager because of this—for mother's sake and yours. [*Pleadingly*] Oh, Father, the wrong to Mother must be made right. [*Cries threateningly*] The wrong must be righted.

ALBERT

Why do you talk to me like that?

ROBERT

[*Much taken aback*] Forgive me, Father, please. I didn't mean to shout.

ALBERT

I suppose you hate me.

ROBERT

No. No. Why should we hate you?

ALBERT

You spoke in such a threatening tone just now.

ROBERT

I didn't mean to. . . . I beg your pardon. Mother doesn't know what hate is. Why, I remember that even during the war, when everyone was supposed to hate everyone else, she used to say: "God be with us and our enemies."

ALBERT

Your mother said that? Did you understand what she meant?

ROBERT

Mother doesn't say things you can't understand. Father—I—please—right the wrong to Mother.

ALBERT

I'll right it through you.

[ROBERT, carried away by his emotion, starts to sob and kisses his father's hand. ALBERT, himself suppressing a sob, says:] No. No. We won't be sentimental.

[Telephone rings.]

ALBERT

[*Taking up 'phone*] Hello. Yes. Oh, yes, Counselor. [*Listens.*] The calendar is being made up at eleven tomorrow. Fine. How are you? Good-bye. [*Puts 'phone up.*] Your mother wanted me to tell you certain things. . . . It isn't always easy for a parent. Robert, you know nothing of passion.

ROBERT

Yes, I do. Mother's told me a person should be impulsive but controlled.

ALBERT

Your mother told you that? But has she also told you that love can turn us into beasts?

ROBERT

No. That's only what they call love, Father. True love is the heavenly climate of our innermost being, the divine warmth of a sun that satisfies and exalts us.

ALBERT

You don't tell me.

ROBERT

I know something about it. I'm not absolutely inexperienced.

ACT TWO

75

ALBERT

Really?

ROBERT

I've been to school, and I've read a lot.

ALBERT

Oh, books—school. I thought——

ROBERT

You thought that I do not know what the passion of love is? I do.

ALBERT

Ah—my son. [*Smiles.*]

ROBERT

I know, too, I shall have to tread the path all human beings do, only I don't know how—how it's to happen and when—and whether it has to be the way the boys say.

ALBERT

You're very touching. I was different from you at sixteen. Your mother should have called you Parsifal.

ROBERT

You know she did once.

ALBERT

When was that?

ROBERT

When I told her something.

ALBERT

[*Hopefully*] What?

ROBERT

I can't tell you.

ALBERT

Why not?

ROBERT

No, I can't.

ALBERT

You can't tell me and you've told your mother?

ROBERT

Naturally.

ALBERT

We're to be friends, aren't we? You've called me Father of your own free will.

ROBERT

But I can't tell you this. It's something secret, something so close to the heart.

ALBERT

Ah, then you are in love with someone?

ROBERT

Yes, but I don't think you will understand.

ALBERT

My dear Robert, where love is concerned I think I can understand everything—even what my sixteen-year-old boy can teach me. Why don't you express yourself? A poet must be able to express everything. Your mother told me once you wanted to be a poet.

ROBERT

I can't be a poet.

ALBERT

Why not?

ROBERT

Because there are some things I can't say.

ALBERT

What? Not even to me?

and so on

ROBERT

No, I can't. [*He hesitates.*] I should like to be able to say how the wind rustles in the trees—rustles. I should like to be able to say chords, but most of all I should like to say water rippling. I lie for hours by the brook and listen, and press my ear close to it and try to find out

how to say it, but I can't—I can't. I work so hard to get that crystal, silver thing into me, the way it chucks and pl-pl-plashes, but I can't—I can't. It's a terribly difficult secret, and only when I know it I think I will be a poet.

ALBERT

And hasn't this mysterious love of yours made a poet of you?

ROBERT

No, I can't say a thing about love, either. But I found out something about—about not being able to say things.

ALBERT

Yes? What have you found out?

ROBERT

Not a poem—only—only talking.

[*Simply, almost in the tone of explanation, like a school-boy*]

People concentrated to the deepest religion

[*Rises very slowly.*]

Have never uttered

The name of their Godhead

No words can name it

My love springs from the same fount

And words

Are soundless before it

Dumb and soulless
 So too, the deepest thirst of my soul,
 All that I dreamed of,
 All that I aspire to do and to be,
 Are here;

[*He points to his heart*]

And my heart yearns to tell,
 But no words can name it.

ALBERT

[*After a silence*] All that you dream of— all that you desire to be are here—yes, yes, I know. Now I know why fathers love their sons. Your mother is right. You are to stay. There are some things that have to be considered. I'll explain about that later. First I must talk to your mother—and then, to someone else.

ROBERT

Mother is coming.

ALBERT

The bell didn't ring. Come, I'll take you over the house and I'll show you the room which may perhaps be yours. Would you like to see it?

ROBERT

I'd love to. All these books!

ALBERT

There are books all over the house.

ROBERT

Father, I haven't dared look about me yet—so many books in one place. If I could only stay here . . . I have thirty-two books, and I thought I had so many. But here . . . [*They both laugh.*] I knew you'd have wonderful things here.

[*Telephone rings.*]

ALBERT

Hello. Yes, dear delicate lady. Even though it is Sunday, I'm always at your service. [*Listens.*] I will talk it over with the opposing counsel first, and you come to-morrow, please, at about five. [*More softly*] Just a few minutes after office hours—I'll be delighted. Good-bye, dear delicate lady. I'm always at your service.

ROBERT

It must be terribly hard being a great lawyer like you.

ALBERT

Oh, terrible, terrible. My clients won't let me alone even on Sundays.

ROBERT

Father, this is so unlike our place in the country. It's wonderful. I love it.

ALBERT

Go as far as you like—it's all yours.

ROBERT

Really, all mine.

[MINNA *enters followed by* AMALIA.]

MINNA

Counselor.

[MINNA *off.*]

AMALIA

Good-afternoon, Albert.

ALBERT

My dear Amalia. Robert sensed your coming before you got here.

AMALIA

He hears bells that no one else knows are ringing.

ROBERT

Mother, just look around. This is where we're going to live. Father has been so kind to me.

ALBERT

You're tired. Sit down.

AMALIA

[*Taking off her hat*] Thank you.

[ALBERT *calls* "MINNA."]

CAPRICE

ROBERT

Macaulay—it's what I wanted for Christmas, Mother, have you ever seen so many books?

[MINNA *enters.*]

ALBERT

Minna, show Robert over the house. Particularly the collection of the *Lex Romanorum*. Twenty-two volumes.

MINNA

Twenty-four, counselor.

ALBERT

[*To AMALIA*]

Minna's as proud of them as I am. She's always dusting them.

MINNA

[*To ROBERT*] This way, sir. It's the finest collection in Europe.

[*ROBERT follows her out left*]

AMALIA

You've had a talk with him——

ALBERT

I find him touching, so sensitive and direct and unusual. Of course he didn't act much like my son.

AMALIA

He didn't?

ALBERT

No. He seemed more like my father. You know he's a curious boy—a curious lovable mixture of innocence and what one might call wisdom.

AMALIA

What did I tell you?

ALBERT

He's a splendid boy, Amalia. I have the greatest admiration for you.

AMALIA

And what have you decided?

ALBERT

He is to stay with me.

AMALIA

I thank you, Albert. And God will bless you for it—both you and your home.

[MINNA enters, having taken “God will bless you for it” as her cue.]

ALBERT

Minna, take Madame Amalia's things. And coffee, please.

CAPRICE

MINNA

Yes, Counselor, it's all ready.

ALBERT

Bring it right in.

[MINNA *exits.*]

He understands how it's to be—he alone—and then only if Ilsa . . .

AMALIA

No, not a word. I wanted to wait and see what you said.

ALBERT

I'm afraid there's going to be one insuperable difficulty. From what he said, I think he expects me to marry you.

AMALIA

[*Laughing it away*] Does he? He is still too young to understand.

ALBERT

You know I can't have you live here. I'm going to marry Ilsa.

AMALIA

But, of course not. I wish you the best luck in the world, Albert. She seemed charming.

ALBERT

Thank you. It will be settled to-day. Now that I've got to know Robert she will have to make her decision. You see I hate to speak about it because . . .

AMALIA

But, Albert, you know you can speak freely to me.

ALBERT

Thank you.

[MINNA enters with coffee tray laid for four, which she places on table in alcove.]

ALBERT

Coffee? Oh, this is Minna, my housekeeper. You know I'm rather a difficult person to get on with, but she's put up with me for six years.

MINNA

Oh, Counselor!

AMALIA

The house is beautifully kept. I can see that.

MINNA

Thank you, ma'am. You know how it is, ma'am, we women are all alike, always arranging things. But just the same it's a positive pleasure to find things where the

Counselor puts them. The other day there was a green slipper——

ALBERT

Yes, Minna, yes. We know.

[*She exits R., and as she does so sees ILSA and holds the door for her.*]

ALBERT

Does Robert take coffee?

AMALIA

Of course.

ALBERT

[*Calling off left*] Robert. . . .

AMALIA

Robert, come and get your coffee.

ROBERT

[*From off left*] Just a minute, Mother.

ILSA

[*Who has entered during the above*] Am I intruding? I just happened to be in the neighborhood. [*To AMALIA*] I'm so delighted to see you again. We had a hurried moment the other day.

AMALIA

How do you do?

ILSA

[*Crossing to ALBERT*] You must forgive me—popping in like this. I was so eager to see him. Where is he?

ALBERT

[*Calling off L.*] Robert, Robert.

[*ROBERT enters with his arms full of books.*]

Here is the lady who has consented——

ILSA

[*To ALBERT. Breaking in on his speech*] Never mind, never mind.

[*To ROBERT*] I'm an old family friend of your father's. His eyes are exactly like yours, Albert. A firmer chin, though—his mother's. [*They all laugh except ALBERT. Turning to ROBERT.*] Well, how is it—the first encounter? Was there a scene? I am so curious. I simply can't imagine what it's like suddenly to have a father or a son. [*To AMALIA*] Aren't you glad?

AMALIA

I haven't been so happy in years.

ILSA

[*To ROBERT*] Aren't you glad?

ROBERT

Oh, yes.

ILSA

Are you glad?

ALBERT

Of course, I'm glad.

ILSA

Well, since we're all glad, let's cut this marvelous cake I've brought especially for the party.

[ILSA and ALBERT cross up to table. ROBERT puts the books on desk and goes up as well.]

ALBERT

[*Having unwrapped the cake*] Oh! Robert, it's Sachertortter.

ILSA

You'll have coffee this afternoon?

ALBERT

No, thank you.

ILSA

Oh! Just half a cup to celebrate.

ALBERT

No.

ILSA

Well, you'll have some cake?

ALBERT

Yes, a little.

[The above lines are spoken as she pours. She then crosses down to AMALIA with a cup of coffee.]

ILSA

Your cup—Amalia.

ALBERT

Robert, bring your mother some cream and sugar.

ROBERT

Yes, Father.

ILSA

I may call you Amalia?

AMALIA

Please.

[By now ILSA has taken her own cup of coffee and is seated on sofa. ROBERT is staring at her as he offers her cream and sugar.]

ILSA

Why are you looking at me like that? Oh, I didn't give you any cake.

ROBERT

No. I can get it.

ALBERT

Never mind. I'll give it to him.

ILSA

How do you like your father? What was the first impression?

[*Laughs*] Look at Albert. You're all dressed up—my, my,—all to impress your son. [*To ROBERT*] Was he very dignified? Very solemn? He really hasn't a spark of humor.

ROBERT

Father was awfully funny.

ALBERT

I was very funny indeed.

ILSA

Albert, I believe you adore your son already.

ALBERT

I'm very proud of him.

ILSA

But you'll have to do something to deserve this pride. So far his mother is the only one who has the right to be proud.

ALBERT

You don't know how right you are.

[ROBERT and ALBERT are now standing side by side, very erect, in exactly the same position, both eating a piece of cake. Their movements simultaneous.]

ILSA

Look at them. Look at them. Look at his hands. Look at his head. Robert, go on, walk for me.

ALBERT

Walk for the lady.

[ROBERT does so D. C. and stops.]

Go on, walk for the lady.

[ROBERT does so to D. R.]

ILSA

Isn't it amazing? Here was a young man right in our midst the very image of you and we didn't know a thing about it. But the image doesn't seem to have much to say. What do you think of your father?

ROBERT

He's been very kind to me.

ILSA

And what do you think of me?

ROBERT

You're funny.

ILSA

Funny?

ROBERT

[*Simply*] Mother, isn't she?

AMALIA

Not funny—but unusual.

ILSA

[*Taking AMALIA's hand*] Thank you, dear.

AMALIA

[*Continuing*] He hasn't met . . . You're the first lady . . .

ROBERT

Are you an actress?

ILSA

An actress? What made you think that?

ROBERT

You're so different from other women.

ILSA

How am I different?

ACT TWO

93

ROBERT

More alive and beautiful. Isn't she, Mother?

AMALIA

Yes, Robert.

ROBERT

Like on the stage. There the people are so brilliant——

ILSA

Amalia, your son is charming.

ROBERT

——and gay and always doing something.

ILSA

Albert, your son is making love to me.

ALBERT

At least he says what he honestly thinks.

ILSA

He's a fine boy.

AMALIA

All this means so much to Robert and me. It probably all seems a little unreal to him, so involuntarily he

thought of the theater. I told him how very kind it would be of his father to consider taking care of him.

ILSA

He only considered it because it would have been inhuman not to.

ALBERT

[*After a look at ILSA and giving ROBERT the coffee tray which he has carried down*] Robert, please . . .

ROBERT

[*Taking the tray from his father and crossing up to table with it*] Yes, surely.

AMALIA

But, please. Not in front of Robert.

ALBERT

Really, Ilsa. . . .

ILSA

There, you see, right from the first embarrassments are unavoidable. [*They all laugh as ROBERT returns to sofa.*] Has the first meeting resulted in anything yet?

ALBERT

Not yet. Amalia and I have a few things to talk over. If you don't mind . . .

ILSA

Oh, you want me to go.

AMALIA

Please stay, please. You and I must be friends.

ILSA

No, thank you. I can't stay anyway. I was only looking in on my way to keep an engagement with Carol Kocherak.

ALBERT

Who?

ILSA

He's a Czech. A charming Czech.

ALBERT

I never heard that name before.

ILSA

He is a man I met last night at my mother's.

ALBERT

Oh!

AMALIA

We'll only be a few minutes. Couldn't we talk about it somewhere else?

CAPRICE

ALBERT

Certainly. Ilsa can stay with Robert—unless she prefers to be with her charming Czech!

[ALBERT and AMALIA go off right.]

ILSA

You decide, Robert. Shall I stay?

ROBERT

Yes, do.

ILSA

Has your father said anything to you about me?

ROBERT

No.

ILSA

Has your mother ever mentioned my name?

ROBERT

No.

[Pause]

Why did they have to go in there?

ILSA

Don't you really know?

ROBERT

No.

ILSA

You certainly must know that they're deciding whether you stay in this house or not.

ROBERT

Yes, but Father has already told me he wanted me to stay.

ILSA

And it's also a question of what is going to happen to your mother.

ROBERT

[*Laughs*] Happen to her? Why, nothing.

ILSA

I mean whether she's to stay here or——

ROBERT

Mother? Of course she's to stay here. We belong together.

ILSA

Oh, you do. [*Laughs.*] And I thought it would take three months. Oh, Ilsa, you are still too naïve for this wicked world.

ROBERT

What do you mean by "three months"?

ILSA

Nothing. So you are both staying here? That's definite, at any rate.

ROBERT

Why do you ask?

ILSA

Oh, I'm just naturally curious.

ROBERT

Now I think of it—mother didn't say anything anything about it.

ILSA

Well, I know enough.

ROBERT

But that's obvious.

ILSA

Is it?

ROBERT

If Father takes me he must take Mother too. There is to be a new life for the three of us now. We've talked about nothing else for a week.

ILSA

[*Bursts out laughing*] Aha!

[*Both laugh.*]

ROBERT

[*Smiles*] You are a funny lady.

ILSA

[*Laughs*] Yes, I am—so you talked of nothing else all week.

ROBERT

Naturally.

ILSA

Saying that your mother would stay here too and your father marry her.

ROBERT

[*Naïve*] No, Mother didn't say a word about that.

ILSA

But you took it for granted?

ROBERT

Of course, of course.

ILSA

Well, then, everything's settled. [*Rises to coffee table.*] More cake, Robert.

ROBERT

No, thank you.

[*She takes a piece, eats it as she comes down*]

ILSA

That changes everything. Well—that's that. If your father is going to marry your mother "of course," why, then, we can be friends.

[*He doesn't understand*]

But first I must ask you not to call me a funny lady any more—not that I haven't a sense of humor—but . . . [*She laughs.*]

ROBERT

[*Brightened*] I won't do it again. I didn't mean any harm.

ILSA

I hope not.

ROBERT

I only meant that you—act so—like a child.

ILSA

I've managed to preserve my childishness.

ROBERT

[*Very naïve*] And you're grown up.

ILSA

That's enough from you, young man. I can't quite make you out. [*He looks at her uncomprehendingly*] You seem so inexperienced and at the same time you have

so much poise. Who taught you, your mother? The high school you went to? Dancing school? Tell me.

ROBERT

I never went to dancing school.

ILSA

Tell me about yourself. Have you ever been out to parties? With women? Been out with young girls? Has your mother many friends?

ROBERT

No, no, she has only one friend, a neighbor, a widow of an army captain. I call her grandmother.

ILSA

Grandmother! How sweet! Does it embarrass you to talk to women? I mean, do you feel any difference between talking to a man and a woman? Any excitement or confusion?

ROBERT

[*Hesitating*] No. You are the first lady who ever—— I always wanted to, that's why I asked you to stay.

ILSA

So I am the first woman—but surely you must have seen young girls in the neighborhood who attracted you? Didn't you want to talk to them?

ROBERT

No, I didn't.

ILSA

No? May I ask you an indiscreet question? Haven't you ever had the desire to hold a woman's hand or to kiss her?

ROBERT

Why do you ask?

ILSA

It interests me.

ROBERT

[*Still completely at ease*] There isn't a day passes that I haven't a deep, true desire to hold a woman's hand.

ILSA

And to kiss her?

ROBERT

Yes—that is, I haven't dared wish that yet.

ILSA

Haven't dared? You don't seem so shy.

ROBERT

[*Softly*] But I really am.

ILSA

Is it any special woman?

ROBERT

Yes.

ILSA

But you just said that no woman had ever attracted you before.

ROBERT

Yes, I did say that. It is true and yet it isn't true.

ILSA

I don't understand.

ROBERT

It's funny. My father asked me the very same question to-day.

ILSA

[*Laughs*] That isn't funny at all. It's the only subject he's interested in. Well, and did you tell him?

ROBERT

No, you can't talk about things like that.

ILSA

Then there really is some special woman in your life. Tell me—I won't give you away.

ROBERT

In my life? Yes, you might say that.
Mother knows all about it.

ILSA

[*Quickly*] She knows? And she doesn't object?

ROBERT

[*Shrugs*] When I told her, her face got all red and tears came into her eyes. She didn't say anything. That confused me, and I didn't ask why or ever speak about it again.

ILSA

Perhaps that's why your mother came to your father. Interesting. Now, tell me. What does she look like—this woman? Where did you meet her?

[*He is silent, looks at her smiling, hesitating, is silent.*]

Please, please, please. Do you want me to go down on my knees? Now, who is she?

ROBERT

A princess.

[*ILSA is pleasantly surprised.*]

ILSA

Is she beautiful?

ROBERT

The most beautiful woman in the world.

ILSA

Where did you meet her?—Where?—Well, go on. Where?

ROBERT

I meet her every night.

ILSA

Well, where?

ROBERT

In bed.

ILSA

[*Stares at him, laughs*] In bed?

ROBERT

I—I think—I said something silly. I must tell you now, otherwise you, I think—please, listen—it is a dream, a make-believe. For two or three years, I don't know just how long, I've been dreaming every night—really, before I got to sleep—of a lady. Always the same dream. When I lie in bed and everything is still I'm back in the Middle Ages. It isn't exactly a dream. I'm really awake, and yet I don't remember when it was she first came to me. I love her, of course. Each night she sends me on a different quest. I know this sounds childish now. But at night it's different. I have feathers in my cap, and she wears those sleeves with trains to them, and colored jewels and heavy gold bracelets, and——

ILSA

[*More and more astonished*] But she's a real person, isn't she, this woman you dream about?

ROBERT

No, no, no. I don't know her—even in my dream I've never looked into her face. I don't know why, but I never can see what she really looks like—all I know is that she's a princess.

ILSA

You must have seen some woman somewhere who reminds you of her.

ROBERT

No.

ILSA

Never? In the theater—you've been to the theater, haven't you?

ROBERT

Yes, maybe I have in the theater—maybe I have.

ILSA

Are her hands anything like mine?

ROBERT

[*Looks at them*] Perhaps.

ILSA

And her feet?

ROBERT

[*Looks at them*] Yes, they might be like yours, if she were descending the steps of a terrace. But she always wears long boots of yellow leather.

ILSA

In mediæval costume? Oh, then she's on a horse.

ROBERT

Yes. How do you know?

ILSA

Oh, I just guessed.

ROBERT

She rides a piebald palfry.

ILSA

And you go riding together?

ROBERT

No, I just run next to the horse.

ILSA

Why aren't you riding too?

ROBERT

Because I don't know how to ride.

ILSA

I—can—ride.

ROBERT

Can you?

[On a sudden impulse she sits on the arm of the big chair in which he is seated, sidesaddle, as if on a horse; she grips imaginary reins and rides naturally, modestly, gracefully.]

ROBERT

Yes, like that.

ILSA

Don't you ever wish your dreams would come true?

ROBERT

All I wanted was just to have it like that.

ILSA

But I want things to be real. So she rides, this lady in the yellow boots? And you?

ROBERT

I run panting next to the horse, and she sometimes touches the back of my neck with her hand.

ILSA

Whoa! Soon I'll come riding by in yellow boots.

ROBERT

I kiss the hem of her dress—and sometimes I'm allowed to hold her hand in mine—and that's how I go to sleep [*Pause—he has shut his eyes.*—every night.

ILSA

[*Looks down at him*] Are you dreaming, my page?
[*He nods.*]

Are you asleep, my page? [*Softly*] You may take my hand in yours [*She takes his hand, which he quietly lets her keep.*—and go to sleep [*After a little pause she bends over and kisses his lids.*—and awake . . .
[ROBERT jumps up, stands trembling before her.]

No, no. We mustn't try to gallop. It isn't good for either of us.
[*She looks silently at ROBERT who stares at her, breathing quickly. A short pause. AMALIA enters.*]

AMALIA

Robert, Robert. Your father wants to speak to you.
[*Looks at ILSA, who is entirely at ease now, with repulsion; and then at ROBERT. ROBERT goes off quickly Right.*]

AMALIA

Why did Robert rush from the room like that?

ILSA

I don't know. [*She laughs.*]

AMALIA

You mean——

ILSA

I don't mean anything. Why are you looking at me like that?

AMALIA

But I don't understand. What has happened?

ILSA

What has happened? Let me think. [*She laughs.*]
Nothing. . . .

AMALIA

Nothing? Why was he looking at you like that?

ILSA

That isn't a nice question, Amalia. Lots of men do.
Why so *émotionnée*? We were only joking.

AMALIA

But to a boy like Robert the slightest thing—even a breath is dangerous.

ACT TWO

111

ILSA

Dangerous? Where's the danger? He was only telling me his dream.

AMALIA

He told you his dream?

ILSA

Why are you so surprised? Don't you know that a shy person is apt to confide more easily in a stranger than in someone he knows?

AMALIA

But Robert is so sensitive that if you——

ILSA

[*Interrupts her sharply*] I didn't come here to steal your son but to keep his father. I wanted to have a friendly talk with you as a woman, and you take this hostile attitude.

AMALIA

You are mistaken. Nothing is further from my thoughts. It's only that I can't help feeling terribly worried.

ILSA

[*Breaking in*] Don't let's beat about the bush. You brought your son here very cleverly with only one intention, and that was to get rid of me and take my place.

AMALIA

How wrong you are. First listen to me. You've got to . . .

ILSA

[*Taking "listen to me" as cue*] Don't you realize that you are disrupting the lives of two people? That you are the intruders?

AMALIA

I have no intention of forcing my way into this house. It's solely a question of Robert. Can you believe that I came here to tamper with your love—that I could do anything so indecent?

ILSA

Good God! There's no decency or indecency in love affairs. It's like war. You do what you must do.

AMALIA

You talk of love affairs and I of love. For God's sake, don't play with love. Love is sacred.

ILSA

Is it? I hadn't noticed that.

AMALIA

Don't you realize that love is utter surrender? An exchange of lives?

ILSA

Utter surrender!

AMALIA

Yes, there's been only one man in my life—Albert. I waited for him for ten long years. He never came. Then something died in me, and at the same time something new was born. I realized the emptiness of passion. And the reason I was alive came to me like a great light.

ILSA

Hasn't this taught you that you mustn't stake your whole happiness on one man? Now, I know it may sound heartless to you, but don't you realize how false your philosophy is? Love is utter surrender! An exchange of lives! Is any man worth it?

AMALIA

We mothers can make a man worth it.

ILSA

That certainly ought to be embroidered and hung on the wall. In reality a woman is only a slave to a man's pleasure.

AMALIA

We are when we allow ourselves to sink to that level. For the last sixteen years——

ILSA

[*Cutting her short*] Yes, I know. You've lived like a nun for sixteen years. Albert couldn't live like a monk for a week. Do you suppose he cares how you've lived for sixteen years? I couldn't hold him for sixteen minutes by the sacredness of love. Before you talk about love, Amalia, you'd better learn more about men. Men are nothing but selfish pigs. They don't deserve to be considered as anything but biological necessities.

AMALIA

[*Suddenly rising*] Now I do fear for Robert. I really didn't know what sort of woman you were. What's happened here?

ILSA

[*Teasing her*] Think what you like. He's his father's son, isn't he?

AMALIA

[*Quickly*] Then he did make love to you. Now I am afraid. Good God! What's going to happen? What's going to happen?

ILSA

Well, life is so deliciously uncertain, almost anything might happen.

AMALIA

What do you mean?

ILSA

I mean that Robert seems so inflammable—and you, Amalia, seem so imaginative.

AMALIA

Leave me out of it.

ILSA

But I can't very well leave you out of it, for I'm going to follow your example. I'm going to try and be as simple and direct as you. You came. I'm going.

AMALIA

You're going?

ILSA

Yes, I'm just in the mood.

[She crosses with bag and things to mirror L.]

AMALIA

But you love Albert.

ILSA

You needn't fear that I'll die of a broken heart. Leave it to time. Leave it to time.

AMALIA

[As she goes off left] No. It will have to be settled at once.

ILSA

[*Left alone, is putting on her hat*] To hell with everything!

[*There is a knock at the door right.*]

Come in.

[*The DOCTOR enters.*]

How do you like my new hat?

DOCTOR

Ravishing.

ILSA

What do you think of the philosophy of—To hell with everything?

DOCTOR

It's simply the categorical imperative of getting rid of everything by a shrug of the shoulders.

ILSA

You know, it's very easy not to take life too hard. People think themselves and their own little lives much too important. So, to hell with everything.

DOCTOR

In other words, you've had a quarrel with Albert.

ILSA

Not even the shadow of a quarrel.

DOCTOR

Where is Albert?

ILSA

Albert has company. The whole family have moved in from the country.

DOCTOR

I've been waiting to talk to you all week.

ILSA

Out with it.

DOCTOR

Now, look here, don't you realize you and Albert have a mission to fulfill?

ILSA

More missions!

DOCTOR

You are frittering your lives away. I wonder, do you know how empty such a relationship may become?

ILSA

The dear Lord seemed to have thought it over too. A good deal has been happening recently that you don't know about. Good-bye, darling.

[*She kisses him and starts off R.*]

DOCTOR

[*Stopping her*] Just a minute. Don't you know he needs you?

ILSA

Does he?

DOCTOR

He can't live without you.

ILSA

Can't he?

DOCTOR

When are you two going to marry?

ILSA

Never.

DOCTOR

Well, why not?

ILSA

It's against the law for a man to have two wives.

DOCTOR

But the other one doesn't matter.

ILSA

Oh, doesn't she?

DOCTOR

That silly little blonde! A client, nothing more. A little flirtation—purely cerebral——

ILSA

And the dirty dog dares be jealous of me. No, no, that's not the woman I'm talking about.

DOCTOR

What woman are you talking about?

ILSA

The one who is in there now. The one who has brought her sixteen-year-old baby along with her.

DOCTOR

Baby? Whose baby?

ILSA

His baby. You're just in time for the family reunion.

DOCTOR

Oh, am I? The family reunion is no place for the family doctor.

[*He makes a move to go. ILSA stops him.*]

Oh, no, you're all right. I'm the one who's disturbing the family picture. So, exit complications. I'm leaving Amalia——

DOCTOR

Amalia? Who's Amalia?

ILSA

Amalia's the mother of his child.

DOCTOR

[*Getting the situation*] Oh!

ILSA

I'm leaving Amalia—the simple direct Amalia—to talk at length about the loftier love [*They both laugh*] and the meaning of life. He needs the lesson. Maybe they'll both learn something. Good-bye.

[*She starts off.*]

DOCTOR

Where are you going?

ILSA

I'm off to the Bavarian Mountains. And this time I'm not coming back.

[*ILSA goes off R. and slams the door. After the door slams AMALIA enters followed by ALBERT and ROBERT.*]

DOCTOR

Albert, how are you to-day?

[*They both shake hands and laugh, being embarrassed each for a different reason.*]

ALBERT

This is my son Robert, whom I've never seen. This is my doctor. This is Amalia, his mother—Where's Ilsa?

DOCTOR

She's gone.

ALBERT

Gone? She shouldn't have gone. We had something to talk over. It had to be settled to-day.

DOCTOR

If I heard her correctly she's gone forever.

ALBERT

[*Greatly relieved*] Oh, forever. Then she's just outside the door and ready to pop in. It's a little idiosyncrasy of hers.

[*He goes to door calling ILSA quietly. He goes out of room calling ILSA louder and louder off stage: He calls four times in all. There is no answer. He re-enters the room embarrassed and annoyed. After a pause during which an attack becomes more and more imminent, he rushes to the bicarbonate and takes a huge dose. He is just getting over the effects of the gulp when the curtain has completed its fall.*]

FAST CURTAIN

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

Ten days after the Second Act. The same room. There are a few changes in the flowers, and potted plants.

The curtain rises on a scene of seeming domestic quiet. ALBERT is at his desk working at a case. AMALIA is seated in the arm chair U. L. in alcove reading a book. ROBERT is lying at full length on sofa doing his best with a French novel.

AMALIA

You know, Albert, after the quiet of the country it takes one a little while to get used to the city. There's a rumble of life here, isn't there?

ALBERT

Yes, one gets used to things if one is a part of them.

AMALIA

Yes, I suppose that's true.
[*There is a moment's pause.*]

ALBERT

This is the most extraordinary case.

CAPRICE

ROBERT

[*Looking up from book*] Is it, Father?

ALBERT

I've got to defend a man who in a moment of impetuosity attempted to burn the University Library.

AMALIA

But, why?

ALBERT

That's what we don't know. People are always doing impetuous things for reasons that they don't understand.

[*ALBERT goes on with his work. AMALIA goes off left to get a flowered plant which she puts in the up-stage end of flower box at window.*]

AMALIA

I think this will look charming here, don't you?

ROBERT

Yes. It does look nice doesn't it, Father?

ALBERT

Yes, very nice.

[*A moment's pause.*]

Where is that copy of the Civil Code?

AMALIA

I put it back with the law books, Albert. I'll get it for you.

ALBERT

Oh, never mind. Never mind. [*He rises and looks about room.*] Have you seen the evening newspaper?

AMALIA

I thought you were through with it. I told Minna she could read it.

ALBERT

Never mind, never mind. I'll get it. [*He starts toward door U. L. and stops.*]

Ask Minna to keep the sponge damp in the cigar box. The cigars are getting dry.
[*He goes off L.*]

AMALIA

What are you reading, Robert?

ROBERT

French, Mother.

AMALIA

Some day, perhaps, you'll be reading Italian too.
[*She goes off right, tidying as she goes. ROBERT, left alone, reading his French novel, considers the advisability of smoking a cigarette. He decides to do*

so. Rises to table down R.—takes cigarette—lights it—handles it amateurishly: it won't light properly, it sticks to his lips, etc. He resumes his position on sofa. He takes a long puff of the cigarette, which makes him choke, when the telephone rings. He rushes, coughing, to it—cigarette in hand.]

ROBERT

Hello—hello—Oh! It's you Mrs. Von Ilsen. . . . Yes, it's I. . . . No, there's nothing the matter with me—why should I be out of breath? . . . Father? Yes, he's home. He hasn't been so well. . . . Yes, he's been working hard. He won an important case this morning. I was in court with him. . . . What? . . . Oh, Mother and Father are having late dinner at the Imperial. . . . Me? . . . No, I've got to stay home and study. . . . Yes, of course I want to see you again: Where have you been? Father's been trying to get in touch with you for the last ten days. . . . Why? . . . In half an hour? . . . Yes, if you want me to. . . . Yes, I'll be at the window and wave my handkerchief. . . . No I'm just having a smoke. [*He takes a long puff of the cigarette which chokes him again.*] . . . Oh, nothing. . . .

[ALBERT enters from R. with cigar and newspaper.]

Here comes Father now—one minute.

[TO ALBERT] Father, Mrs. Von Ilsen is on the 'phone.

[ALBERT has crossed down right end of sofa and has placed newspaper on sofa. He starts hurriedly for

the 'phone, then reconsiders and walks in a dignified manner toward it. He takes up the 'phone. ROBERT crosses to window R.]

ALBERT

Hello . . . Yes, I'm very well, thank you. Where are you now? . . . Oh! The Opera! Stop in on your way. . . . Yes. . . . Good-bye.

[He hangs up, crosses to piano bench, and plays a few bars]

Well, how did you like your first experience of a trial? And what did you think of me?

ROBERT

[Crossing up to corner of piano. At ALBERT's left]
 Father, please don't misunderstand me. If I admire something very much it's difficult for me to say so. But I'm going to try to break myself of the habit. I'm going to begin right now. Yes, Father, I admired you tremendously this morning.

ALBERT

It was really a great success. Not just the summing up, but the way I swung the jury and held the entire courtroom. Did you notice how I did it? Part of the time very simply—part of the time with irony—part of the time with emotion. That's how I always do it.

ROBERT

You mean to say it was all put on, Father? Your intensity and fervor and anger—was it all assumed?

ALBERT

All assumed. I didn't have the slightest interest in the defendant. I wanted to win my case. I can't be expected to take a personal interest in all my clients.

ROBERT

But why did you have to pretend, then? If you have a good enough case.

ALBERT

There is no such thing as a good or bad case. There are only good and bad lawyers.

ROBERT

There should only be good lawyers.

ALBERT

Yes there should be, but there aren't. A lawyer must be an artist, as well as a lawyer, to be a lawyer. You must be able to play on the emotions of the jury as you would on the strings of a harp. [ALBERT *plays Glissando—starts 2 A's below middle C.*] You must prejudice the judge in your favor without seeming to. It's an amusing game. When you're a lawyer you'll realize how much æsthetic satisfaction you can get just from the art of it.

ROBERT

Father, must I be a lawyer?

ALBERT

Must? No, you mustn't. But it is my dearest wish that you should. How can you say anything against a profession about which you know nothing? There's poetry in law.

ROBERT

No, there isn't, Father. I saw enough already. I saw enough this morning. Enough to——

ALBERT

I shouldn't like to force you, but it would be a great disappointment to me if you didn't. I should like to see you rise from my shoulders—have you go on where I stopped. That would mean great happiness to me, and I hoped it would to you. There must be a meaning to your coming into my life after so many years. You must fulfill that meaning.

ROBERT

Father, Mother says you've been to a notary about me.

ALBERT

Yes.

ROBERT

I thank you, Father, for all you've done and are planning to do for me. But you mustn't. I can't let you now. I don't need anything, Father. I'll earn money for myself.

ALBERT

As a poet?

ROBERT

Perhaps.

ALBERT

But you just said you didn't want to be a lawyer.

ROBERT

If you want me to. You're so good to me, Father. . . .

ALBERT

Well, I'm very fond of you.

ROBERT

I've never done anything to deserve all this.

ALBERT

Not yet.

ROBERT

Father, may I say something?—We have been here ten days, and you have been so good to us. Why doesn't

Mother tell me what her future is to be? I mean—is nothing to be legalized? Why won't she tell me anything? Why does she evade me?

ALBERT

Wait a few days—till to-morrow anyway.

[AMALIA *enters from left.*]

AMALIA

I found three tickets in my room—for us?

ALBERT

Of course—whom else?

AMALIA

For the opera to-morrow. Robert, what do you say?

ROBERT

Oh, I'm so happy, Mother. [*He kisses his mother and draws her to him. He turns to his father and says formally:*] Thank you, Father.

ALBERT

But you kiss your mother.

ROBERT

Oh, men don't kiss.

AMALIA

You're spoiling us. Opera, theater, music, pictures——

ROBERT

[*Taking "theater" as a cue*] Books, cigarettes, automobile rides——

ALBERT

I'm very glad to see you enjoying yourselves.

ROBERT

There's just one thing more.

ALBERT

What's that?

ROBERT

I want to smoke cigars.

ALBERT

Why not? I'll buy three boxes to-morrow.

AMALIA

But, Robert.

ROBERT

I can manage cigarettes now. And I can tie my ties properly.

ALBERT

And next week we'll motor through the forest to Giesling for the new wine.

AMALIA

What a frivolous family we are.

MINNA

[*Enters with package*] This has just come for you, Master Robert.

ROBERT

What is it?

ALBERT

Well, open it and see.

AMALIA

Minna, one moment please. How is this skirt in the back? I can't get a look at it in the mirror.

MINNA

It looks all right to me. I think that dress is lovely on you, madam, so elegant.

AMALIA

Do you think so, Minna? I think so too. Thank you, Minna.

[*MINNA exits R.*]

ROBERT

[*Having unwrapped the package*] Mother, this is the print I admired at the exhibition yesterday—Sacred and Profane Love.

ALBERT

Imagine.

AMALIA

Yesterday you admired it and to-day it's yours! Why do they call them that? You know, Robert, no one knows which is which.

ALBERT

Perhaps Titian had his reasons for keeping it a secret.

ROBERT

May I hang it in my room?

ALBERT

Yes—as long as you don't hang it in mine.

ROBERT

Why did he call them that? —Sacred and Profane Love—two different figures, but they sit by the same fountain, by the same waters—of life—perhaps that's it. I don't know.

ALBERT

Well, if you don't know it won't hurt you. Hang it up.

ROBERT

Thanks, I will right now.

[*He exits L.*]

ALBERT

That boy puzzles me, but I liked him the minute I saw him.

AMALIA

You know I don't know what effect all this is going to have on him. I hope it doesn't change him.

ALBERT

Why should it?

AMALIA

To tell you the truth, I think my own head's being turned a little. It's all so delightfully new to us. The first thing you know we'll be going to the Bristol after the theater to dance.

ALBERT

Why not?

AMALIA

I'm only joking—just making jokes.

ALBERT

You're terribly frivolous, aren't you, Amalia? Watch out. Watch out. Don't let it go too far, my dear. I know

something of the gay life. Sometimes I think that in having lived and experienced everything I haven't lived at all. You see, that's what Robert's done to me.

AMALIA

Perhaps that's why I brought him. But should I? This is a dangerous atmosphere.

ALBERT

What, here?

AMALIA

Was it right for us to come—for me?

ALBERT

My dear Amalia, this problem may seem insoluble, but rely on me. It's my business, untangling knots.

AMALIA

I know that it is, because of what happened here a week ago—Ilsa's going—that things have been so much easier for all of us.

ALBERT

It's not as simple as all that. In fact, as far as I'm concerned it's devilishly complicated.

AMALIA

But not as bad as it was.

ALBERT

In some ways, no. The problem of arranging the extra money was simple enough. It's where the emotions are involved that the difficulties really begin.

AMALIA

I know. But since Ilsa has vanished without a trace.

ALBERT

Ilsa as yet has not perfected the art of vanishing. She's in Vienna. She just telephoned a minute ago.

AMALIA

I thought she meant it when she said she was going away forever.

ALBERT

She undoubtedly did. But for people with as spontaneous a sense of proportion as Ilsa's, forever mayn't be so long. However, I'm going to make it very plain to her to-day that all this nonsense must stop. I'll settle everything to-night.

AMALIA

She is coming here?

ALBERT

[*Amazed*] You don't like Ilsa.

AMALIA

No, no, it's not that. Not dislike—fear.

ALBERT

Fear?

AMALIA

I must be honest. I've had only one talk with Ilsa. I didn't know there were people like that.

ALBERT

Oh, Amalia. Like what? Of course, she lives in a very different world from you.

AMALIA

But she has strange ideas.

ALBERT

Strange—is one way of putting it.

AMALIA

Is she really a good person? I mean [*covering her embarrassment*] has she a real sense of values?

ALBERT

My dear Amalia, there's a lot about Ilsa that I don't approve of, but a woman certainly has a sense of values, as you care to put it, who has the courage to live her own

life richly and completely and can shrug her shoulders at fate with such gay defiance.

AMALIA

Forgive me. I didn't mean to hurt you. What I meant was—Isn't there something lacking here? [*She points to her heart.*]

ALBERT

Something lacking? Don't be too noble, Amalia. When two women don't like each other one can only smile and pray for peace.—You mean she hasn't any heart?

AMALIA

Perhaps.

ALBERT

My dear Amalia, I see a great many things in Ilsa's life that fall short of perfection, but I see no reason why you and I should discuss that. [*He makes a move toward the door L.*]

AMALIA

Albert, I didn't mean . . .

ALBERT

Doubtless, Amalia, you are the kind, motherly woman that was meant for me, but it's no use. I'm convinced that this domesticity, this celebrated homey happiness would soon get on my—our nerves.

AMALIA

But, Albert, I didn't think . . .

ALBERT

I know Ilsa has her faults. But I love her—perhaps just because of her faults. Of one thing I'm certain: Life isn't worth living without her.

AMALIA

My only wish is that she and I could be friends. Then I could go away with a peaceful mind.

[ROBERT *enters*.]

ROBERT

I've hung the picture.

ALBERT

Well, Robert, where?

ROBERT

Opposite my bed. It looks great.

ALBERT

Opposite your bed! What a delightful place for it! You just look up in the morning and there are—two women.

ROBERT

And I only have to look up and see them. They're so beautiful. That's the meaning of beauty, Father. It's so simple.

ALBERT

Yes, Art is so simple. But Life is so complicated, isn't it, Amalia?

AMALIA

Well, if we're going out for dinner I'd better dress [*as she crosses toward door L. and exits*].

[ROBERT and ALBERT left alone in positions at front of piano. There is a moment's pause. ALBERT glances at door L. ALBERT looks at his watch, after which ROBERT also looks at his. They compare their time, and ROBERT changes his to agree with his father's. ALBERT crosses down R. to taboret and takes some bicarbonate of soda. Looks out of window.]

ROBERT

Oh, Father, I'm so sorry.

ALBERT

[*Crossing toward door L.*] Never mind—when Mrs. Von Ilsen comes call me, will you? I'm going to lie down for a minute. [*As he exits*].

[ROBERT left alone—takes his father's cigar and lights it. Then goes to window to look out, but first hides the cigar behind his back. Crosses down to piano—plays with one finger eight bars of same theme his father plays—stops, looks at wrist watch. Goes

again to window and this time sees ILSA and waves his handkerchief.

He crosses down toward door R. and backs L. as ILSA enters.]

ILSA

[Entering from R.] Hello!

ROBERT

[Embarrassed] Hello!

ILSA

Well, that's a cool reception. Won't you even shake hands?

[He does so.]

How about kissing my hand?

[He does so.]

A gentleman always kisses a lady's hand.

ROBERT

Why, your hair's yellow!

ILSA

Yes, for a change. How do you like it?

ROBERT

Is it a wig?

ILSA

No,

ROBERT

Well, what is it?

ILSA

It's dyed.

ROBERT

Why?

ILSA

Must there be a reason to everything?

ROBERT

Why do you want to seem what you're not?

ILSA

Quite the contrary, I want to help Nature over her little mistakes. I really ought to have electric-blue hair, like an arc light.

ROBERT

But a lady doesn't do such things.

ILSA

What doesn't a lady do nowadays? The point is how she does them.

ROBERT

Why did you have me wave my handkerchief? You could have come without that.

ILSA

Of course, I could have, but just waving a handkerchief gives things a little soupçone of mystery—a dash of forbidden charm. Life is too simple. One must complicate it. You pay calls every day—go up the steps—ring the bell—wait till the door is opened—in season and out of season. It's awful—the monotony of it. You must introduce nuance.

ROBERT

[*Standing at her right*] Why?

ILSA

Because otherwise life and love and everything would grow stale. Come here, Robert. [*She sits chair No. 1 R. of desk. ROBERT comes down to stool.*] Have you ever seen two lovers sitting in the park?

ROBERT

Well, I've seen people——

ILSA

They're lovers, Robert, they're lovers. You probably think they're speaking verses, but they're not. He says, "Do you think it's going to rain?" And she says, "I don't think it's going to rain—I've brought my umbrella." Then he says, "Darling"—and she says, "Darling." Weak minded, Robert, it's weak minded. We have to

drop a touch of essence into life. By "we" I mean all the really clever people all over the world between whom there is a sort of freemasonry which exists without any silly signs or symbols. No matter where we are we immediately recognize each other.

ROBERT

[*Sets stool*] How?

ILSA

By the tips of our noses. By the tips of our toes. But most of all by the tips of our tongues. And we achieve this delightful intimacy—of course I mean spiritual intimacy—by the right word at the right time in the right place. That's tact, Robert. Tact is to know—how—when.

ROBERT

Really?

ILSA

Yes. In a few years you'll see how right I am.

ROBERT

Mrs. Von Ilsen, there are times—— Are you telling the truth?

ILSA

Oh, the truth is something I'm never truthful about.

ROBERT

But surely you can trust me?

ILSA

I don't trust anyone.

ROBERT

It is only people who don't believe in themselves that have no faith in others.

ILSA

Who told you that?

ROBERT

Mother.

ILSA

Well, that also should be framed.

ROBERT

What?

ILSA

Nothing—just something a very clever woman once said to me. Now, I'm going to give you a bit of advice which will last you the rest of your life: Give everybody, especially women, everything, utterly everything—except your confidence.

ROBERT

Why?

ILSA

Why? Why? All these whys? Why did we go riding that day? Why did I bid you wave to me from the casement window? Or why did I dye my hair? If one knew the answer to "why" one would know everything.

ROBERT

You're so different to-day—not a bit like the last time.

ILSA

That's the nicest compliment you could pay me.

ROBERT

[*In a hushed voice—indicating the sofa*] Was that—true?

ILSA

[*Whispering—gently mocking his tone*] It was at the moment.

ROBERT

It makes me so unhappy that I can't understand you.

ILSA

I'm in a different mood, that's all. Don't let that worry you.

[*MINNA enters with a tray on which are one or two letters.*]

MINNA

[*To ROBERT and crossing up to table in alcove with tray*] Letters for your mother.

ROBERT

Thank you, Minna.

[MINNA *exits.*]

ILSA

Letters for Madame Amalia. Letters here. Ho! Ho!
[*She laughs.*]

ROBERT

Why are you laughing at my mother?

ILSA

Nothing. I was just thinking how different we were. I can't take life seriously. And you've got just enough of your mother in you to make you gloomy.

ROBERT

Gloomy! But Mother and I are not gloomy. Our world is like a tree in bloom on which God lets the sun gleam.

ILSA

Now, young man, I'm going to give you another piece of advice: Never mention God in a drawing room.

ROBERT

I wish you wouldn't talk like that—in God's name.

ILSA

Little preacher.

ROBERT

It isn't that, but Mother wouldn't like it.

ILSA

Your mother wouldn't like it? So your mother controls everything here? Does she intend to go on being mistress here?

ROBERT

[*Impetuously crossing to left end of sofa*] Would you come here more often if my mother went away?

ILSA

No.

ROBERT

Would you stay here?

ILSA

No. No. Wouldn't think of it!

ROBERT

[*Crossing down and sitting on sofa beside her*] Mrs. Von Ilsen, come. Do come back to us.

ILSA

Robert, I don't want you to think I despise your mother.

ROBERT

You don't? I'm glad of that.

ILSA

[*Laughing it away*] Robert—Robert.

ROBERT

A week ago I wouldn't have stayed in this house without Mother.

ILSA

And now?

ROBERT

Now—I would stay.

[*Kneeling on floor he looks up at her pleadingly.*]

ILSA

I don't want you to think I'm unsympathetic. I want to keep you at a safe distance. I'm trying to be decent. That was why I went away—one of the reasons. I was trying to be decent. Tell your mother that, if you get a chance.

ROBERT

You mustn't keep me at a distance. You are my dream—my happiness. Don't you understand? You are all that I've been dreaming of. Now all of it's come true. I want to do all the heroic deeds in the world for you.

ILSA

Do you? How charming of you, Robert! It would be easy to take advantage of you if one wanted to.

ROBERT

If only you and Mother could get to love each other.

ILSA

Now, Robert, Robert—be a good boy. Be a good boy.

ROBERT

[*Leaning the back of his head on her legs, and she stroking his hair*] I know you're playing with me—and yet [*very sincerely, turning his head to her*—I love you.

ILSA

Of course you do, dear. Now run and tell your father, will you, please?

ROBERT

Yes, I will.

[ROBERT rushes off L. quickly. ILSA, left alone, rises from sofa and crosses, fanning herself, to front of stool left of sofa. ALBERT enters from L. speaking lines as he does so. He meets her stage C.]

ALBERT

Ilsa, Ilsa. I think your behavior—[*Notices her hair—his monocle drops from his eye.*] You've dyed your hair!

ILSA

No, turned gold from grief. Do you like it?

ALBERT

Yes.

ILSA

I knew you would. It makes me seem like another woman, doesn't it?

ALBERT

It's most becoming.

ILSA

Do you still love me?

ALBERT

Of course I do.

ILSA

Still taking bicarb?

ALBERT

What did you expect?

ILSA

Sleep well?

ALBERT

Wonderfully.

ILSA

Oh, do you? Ever think of me?

ALBERT

Incessantly.

ILSA

How can you and sleep well? You don't love me.

ALBERT

[*Noticing her gown*] Whom are you going to the opera with?

ILSA

Nobody. Nobody.

ALBERT

Don't tell me you dress up like that to go to the opera alone. Who is he—that Czech?

ILSA

What a memory you have.

ALBERT

Who is he?

ILSA

Albert, you don't mean to say you're jealous? You—with Amalia here in this house ever since I've been gone. Does Robert chaperon you? He'd make an excellent one.

ALBERT

I insist upon knowing who he is.

ILSA

And I insist upon knowing who this blonde client is—that's another one. Not that I'm jealous.

ALBERT

That's just it, if you had any real feeling you never could have run away like that.

ILSA

If I hadn't had real feeling I wouldn't have come back.

ALBERT

That's true. Forgive me.

ILSA

I forgive you. That's the sort of woman I am. [*He kisses the tip of her nose*] But, of course, I've already had my revenge.

ALBERT

Oh! Why do you torture me?

ILSA

I'm teasing you.

ALBERT

I don't believe you.

ILSA

Now, there you are. When I tell you the truth for the first time in my life you don't believe me. What do you want me to do?

ALBERT

It's not what I want you to do. It's what I don't want you to do. I don't want you to give any other man the slightest encouragement.

ILSA

Very well, dear. [*After a pause.*] Is a kiss an encouragement?

ALBERT

One day there'll be a murder in this house.

ILSA

Oh! Albert! To think that you are the only man I can kiss from now until the day of my death.

ALBERT

Without doubt you are the most abandoned woman that I know.

ILSA

That you know? Isn't that going a bit too far, Albert? What do you mean abandoned?

ALBERT

You know perfectly well what I mean.

ILSA

No one has ever abandoned me.

ALBERT

Have you no conscience? At least I regret my sins.

ILSA

Never mind consciences. Let's have a glass of wine. [ALBERT *pulls the bell pull.*] Minna should have brought it long ago. Your house is badly run since I've been away.

ALBERT

Not badly run. Too well run. Everything is in its place, and I can't find a single thing.

ILSA

Did Minna find my jade slippers? I almost froze to death without them. Albert do you remember?

[*They both laugh hysterically at this reminiscence.*

MINNA *enters during the laugh.*]

ALBERT

Some sherry, please, Minna. Have a glass yourself.

MINNA

Thank you, Counselor.

[MINNA exists.]

ALBERT

Ilsa, Ilsa, I'm so glad you're back. I haven't laughed in a week.

[*They kiss passionately. After a time she says:*]

ILSA

That's enough.

ALBERT

When I kiss you I forgot all the world and all your faults. I have kissed many women, but I swear to you—you are the only one I really want.

[*They kiss again. MINNA enters with tray and two glasses of sherry already poured. She crosses around left end of sofa to taboret D. R. and crosses back around left end of sofa, at which ALBERT says:*]

Thank you, Minna.

MINNA

[*Having ignored the kissing completely*] You're welcome, Counselor.

[*She exits R. ILSA rises, crosses to taboret for glass of sherry—takes a sip. ALBERT reaches out to draw her to him. She stops him with:*]

ILSA

No, no, Albert. You're mad. We aren't alone in the house.

ALBERT

[*Rises*] That's just it. Things are going to be different now.

ILSA

How different?

ALBERT

I've made up my mind. You're going to marry me.

ILSA

Oh! Am I?

ALBERT

Yes, you are.

ILSA

Very well, only on one condition.

ALBERT

All right. Anything—anything.

ILSA

That Robert doesn't stay in this house.

ALBERT

Robert's going to stay in this house—and you're going to marry me.

ILSA

I won't live in the house with a grown-up son.

ALBERT

Why not?

ILSA

People will think he's mine.

ALBERT

What of it?

ILSA

I don't want to look that old, thanks.

ALBERT

But his coming into my life is the greatest happiness I've ever known.

ILSA

I thought I was.

ALBERT

You both are.

[ROBERT enters, taking "I thought I was" as cue, speaking as he enters.]

ROBERT

Father, Mother says she'll be ready in a minute.

ALBERT

Come right in, Robert. I'm glad you've come. There's something I want to tell you about Mrs. Von Ilsen and myself.

ILSA

Albert!

ROBERT

Yes, Father. And there's something I want to tell you about Mrs. Von Ilsen and myself.

ALBERT

But what I have to say is serious.

ROBERT

This is serious, Father.

ALBERT

It's something that concerns all our futures, and it might as well be settled now for once and forever.

ILSA

This time I'll go to the Himalayas—and that will settle everything.

ALBERT

For God's sake, be serious for once.

ILSA

I don't see why we should discuss this in front of Robert.

ALBERT

He must know everything. This concerns him as much as it does you and me. Robert, you must know that your mother never had an idea of remaining in my home.

ROBERT

I don't understand.

ALBERT

It's quite true. Now I see that it would have been better if it had been explained to you the day you arrived. I should have told you—and I would have—had not Mrs. Von Ilsen so precipitously rushed off to the Bavarian Mountains. But now she's back.

ILSA

Oh! Is she?

ALBERT

Yes. And to save further embarrassments—any more evasions are futile—you may as well know that your mother and I never had any intention of marrying.

ROBERT

Father!

ALBERT

Perhaps you are still too young to realize, but sooner or later you'll have to know.

ILSA

Albert, please.

ROBERT

What, Father?

ALBERT

Mrs. Von Ilsen and I have loved each other for a long, long while.

ILSA

For God's sake, Albert.

ROBERT

What?

ALBERT

We have been very happy together for two years.

ROBERT

What?

ALBERT

In other words, our intimacy . . .

ROBERT

I don't understand. What do you mean?

ALBERT

What do I mean? I mean that Mrs. Von Ilsen and I are as good as man and wife.

[ROBERT *breaks with this piece of news.*]

Robert, Robert! What's the matter?

ROBERT

Mother, Mother!

[*He exits L. He cries "Mother" twice off-stage.*]

ALBERT

What's the matter with the boy?

ILSA

I warned you. I told you.

ALBERT

If I'm going to make a man of my son he's got to face reality.

ILSA

Aren't there some things that a boy believes are real that you have forgotten?

ALBERT

What?

ILSA

Oh! You are too clever to be wise.

ALBERT

Never mind about me. What have I got to do with it? A boy of his age should be able to stand a few shocks.

ILSA

I hope you can stand a few yourself.

ALBERT

Well, I guess you know me well enough to realize that I can stand anything.

ILSA

Oh! Can you?—Can you?

[AMALIA enters, rushing from L.]

AMALIA

What's happened? [Sees ILSA.] Oh! Ilsa. Robert says we are to leave at once. He says we must go.

ALBERT

Nonsense.

AMALIA

[Through ALBERT's line, looking at ILSA] I don't know why, but I can guess.

ALBERT

But he's to stay.

AMALIA

I've never seen him like this. He's beside himself. He began throwing his things and mine into his bag.

ALBERT

But I won't have it—sixteen years old and losing his temper.

AMALIA

There was a look in his eyes I've never seen before. He says we cannot stay here another night—another minute.

ALBERT

But why? Why?

ILSA

And they call you the best lawyer in Vienna!

ALBERT

What's my being a lawyer got to do with it?
[ROBERT enters from R. with his bag and his mother's coat.]

ROBERT

[As he enters] Come, Mother.

ALBERT

Robert, you can't leave like this. It's perfectly absurd.

AMALIA

Robert, think it over. Your father's been very good to you. Don't be ungrateful. Let me go alone.

ROBERT

I may be doing Father a wrong, but I did you a wrong too, Mother.

AMALIA

Me?

ROBERT

I wanted to stay and let you go. Forgive me, Mother.

AMALIA

My darling boy.

ALBERT

See what's happened. You shouldn't have gone.

ILSA

I shouldn't have come back.

AMALIA

No. You shouldn't have come back.

ALBERT

What did you mean?

AMALIA

Ask Ilsa.

ALBERT

Ilsa? Robert? I don't understand.

ILSA

It's nothing—nothing.

AMALIA

Good God! Nothing.

ALBERT

What's happened?

AMALIA

I don't know, but you can see the consequences.

ROBERT

Please, please. I can't stand this, Mother. Please—

ALBERT

Now, look here, Robert. You can't leave my house like this.

ROBERT

Yes, I can. I must. I'm going.

AMALIA

Please have Minna send our things. I shouldn't have come. [*To ILSA, crossing to back of sofa*] Now you can see what you've done.

ROBERT

Come, Mother.

[*They both go off R.*]

ALBERT

What have you done to my son?

ILSA

I told you, nothing.

ALBERT

You lie. What have you done to him?

ILSA

Ask him.

ALBERT

Did you deceive me with my son?

ILSA

You're crazy. You're crazy. Did I deceive you with your son?

ALBERT

You've lied to me for the last time in your life.

ILSA

You can tear me to pieces. I'll tell you nothing more than I've told you already.

ALBERT

Get out of my house. Leave me alone. Leave me alone.

ILSA

I don't have to be told. [*Reflecting as she crosses to piano*] You fool—you fool. How you destroy your own life. You've always complained that I never told you the truth, but the important thing is that I never lie to myself. I look life straight in the face, and I see things as they are. I can't change myself. I haven't an ounce of sentimentality in my make-up. I am what I am. But I really love you, God knows I don't want to, but I love you.

ALBERT

You can say that, who took my son from me.

ILSA

He was never yours to take.ⁿ There are people who simply don't belong together even though they are husband and wife or father and son.ⁿ People love to fool themselves with all these sentimental theories about the sacredness of the family. That's what you are trying to do, and it doesn't work. Not one of us knows what is

right or wrong. Amalia thinks she knows, and I think I do. The best we can do is to be true to ourselves. Albert, why don't you try to free yourself from the things that are standing between you and reality. We do what we oughtn't to do because we have to. Do you want to punish me because I'm a human being? Do you want to punish yourself for being one?

ALBERT

I've never known you like this before.

ILSA

You've never known me at all. [*Up to this point ILSA has spoken earnestly, objectively, and absolutely without pathos. She now resumes her old tone of self-irony.*] Perhaps it's better so—perhaps worse. Everyone lives as he can. Good-bye. If you ever need me, if you really need me, and don't keep me waiting too long, maybe I'll come back. Maybe.

ALBERT

Don't worry, I won't need you.

ILSA

[*As she goes off R.*] I won't worry.

[ALBERT sits for a moment—crosses to door—looks out. He closes the door and stands for a moment tapping on it. Crosses up into alcove—closes the window

which ROBERT has left open, and turns out the lamp. Then crosses down to piano, plays a few notes, but stops, leaning over piano, his hand on his forehead. ILSA enters—crosses down and mixes a dose of bicarbonate for him. He becomes aware of her presence when she stirs the bicarbonate. He then resumes the melody at the exact place where he left off playing. The curtain falls slowly when he turns and smiles at her.]

CURTAIN



